PRACTICAL STAGE DIRECTING FOR AMATEURS

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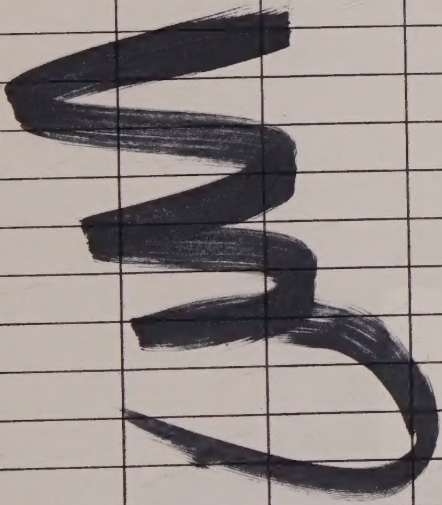

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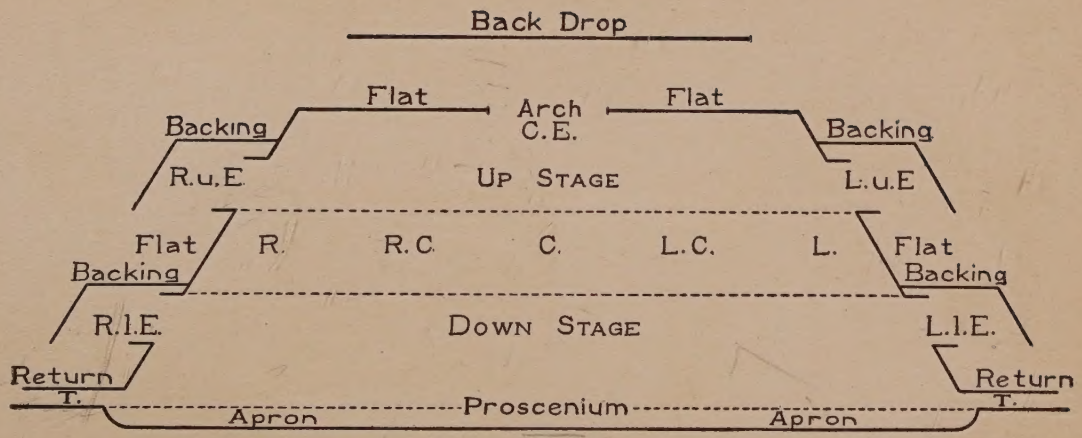

PLAN OF STAGE

Entrances are numbered from front to rear; the Entrance farthest to the rear is called the "Upper entrance." From right to left (actors' right), the Stage divides naturally into five Areas termed Right ("R"); Right Centre ("R.C."); Centre ("C."); Left Centre ("L.C."); Left ("L."). The Tormentors ("T" in the plan) are never used as an entrance.

Practical Stage Directing for Amateurs

A Handbook for Amateur Managers and Actors

By

Emerson Taylor

E. P. Dutton and Company
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Practical Stage Directing for Amateurs

PRACTICAL STAGE DIRECTING FOR AMATEURS

I

INTRODUCTORY

Until comparatively recently, the production and performance of plays by amateurs have been judged by the least exacting standards. Charity spread her mantle wide over shortcomings which were somehow considered inevitable; and, conversely, there was very little effort on the part of those engaged in the performance to accomplish any very ambitious purpose. Critics were scrupulously careful to remember every single actor in their generously glowing tributes; the audience was always willing to express the conviction

that "after all, amateur plays *do* have a charm of their own, so different from *real* plays,"—and meant nothing equivocal. It is perfectly true, as we all know, that a kind of pleasant interest did attach to these friendly gatherings. They were in their way capital fun.

But lately we have come to believe, and probably with good reason, that there is a whole lot more to be got out of amateur performances which are organized, played and judged in a rather different and more exacting spirit. As a growing element in our theater-going population are demanding (and getting, *pace* the croakers!) a better class of plays, something of the same element is asking for improvement in taste and execution in amateur productions. What has happened in the case of the amateur musician is now happening in the case of the amateur actor. He must do better. And responding to this

demand—if one can so name that which is no more than an indefinite but insistent feeling—the actor has found that he has gained in every way. If amateur players aim as high as they can; if they work hard to give a performance which modestly asks to be judged by professional standards; if they try to get all the values possible out of the play; if, instead of merely reading lines, they make a real attempt—with what light they have—to impersonate character, we think there is a great gain all round. Not only is it more fun, but there is also a marked and permanent advance in accepted standards. Not only are rehearsals more interesting, when they are made the occasion of intelligent study, but they are a whole lot more amusing than those of the older type.

One would probably disclaim immediately and with sincerity, when advocating higher standards, any desire to make of

amateur acting one of the pleasures which we Americans are accused of taking sadly. But in chosen lines, something in us makes us want to excel; and if this feeling has come in these days to color the aspirations of those who find entertainment in acting, we can only accept what is an accomplished fact, and help a little to make the best of it. Perhaps, even, the educators are all wrong in believing that the general instinct for self expression, as it finds its outlet by means of the stage, should be carefully nurtured and developed. It may be that the schools, with their pageants and their carefully trained dramatics, are wasting time terribly. But, after all, we appear committed to the experiment; no class is taking the drama with such seriousness as the teachers. And since no experiment is worth anything at all unless it is performed thoroughly and with all the resources of the

laboratory, it is well for us to help the teachers and the investigators all we can. If the steadily growing and spreading interest in the drama both as a fine art, a civic asset, a source of intelligent entertainment, and a force in education, results in a general raising of our critical standards and an intensifying of our sympathetic appreciation, what vast good will be accomplished! And, confident that the performance of plays by amateurs is one of the very best means of quickening their perceptions of the play's dramatic and artistic values, we applaud whole heartedly any attempt to "give a good show."

One cannot teach acting by written formulas and rules; a great part of the success of a good stage manager depends on the personal equation. But it is believed possible, at least, to enumerate the principles on which a good stage production is based, and to make generally avail-

able some of the elementary points of the technical knowledge vitally necessary to both actor and manager. And that is what the following notes attempt to accomplish.

NOTE—To avoid the necessity of referring to an index, the page-headings on the right-hand pages have been made sufficiently detailed to serve as a guide to the reader.

II

THE CHOICE OF A PLAY

THIS first problem to present itself to those who wish to give an amateur performance, is that which can never be solved twice alike. It seems no answer at all to say that the choice of a play depends entirely on circumstances, yet that is so much the case that any more specific answer must bristle with all sorts of reservations and explanations. Requirements and standards are so diverse and various. Here is a group of utterly inexperienced young people who want to "get up a play" for their own amusement, or, incidentally, to raise money for some charity. Here is a boys' or a girls' school, of secondary grade, where participation in school dramatics under supervision is made

an incident of considerable, though sugar-coated, educational value. Here are dramatic clubs of every grade of talent and intelligence, or reading circles, which for a winter have been studying some aspect of the drama, shifting groups of infinitely varied tastes, and requirements, and all of them ask the one question, to begin with: "What are we to choose?"

While one can suggest only with a certain sense of diffidence, it is believed that there is one principle at least which should color and shape all the work of selecting the right play, for whatever group of amateur players. *Select a play worth the trouble and time that must be spent on it!* There is an incalculable amount of time and energy sadly wasted on rehearsing dull stuff by unknown writers. A curious tradition, prevalent still, appears to restrict the amateur to material which the professional stage would never dream

of accepting—puerile farces, unreal emotional pieces, crass and crude sentimental rubbish, with sugar-candy, persecuted heroines, sneering villains, muscular and virtuous heroes, and all the roster of age-old, storehouse characters whom Jerome has held up for our ridicule so deliciously. Do something—or decide to do something—worth while, written by a real playwright to be actually performed by real actors. One must insist that any play selected, though there be no other purpose in the performance than the amusement of the actors, shall be well worth doing well. And this means, as a minimum, that the piece shall give ample opportunity for good acting and impersonation, that it require such careful staging as will put the stage manager and his assistants on their mettle, that its interest, whether of story or pictorial investiture, or both, shall be so broadly human in its sympathetic appeal,

so colorful, as to awaken a real response in both audience and players.

More specifically, plays of direct and strong general appeal, whether serious or comic, are the ones best adapted (other things being equal) for amateur use. Plays of sound sentiment—not sentimentality—which have self sacrifice, patriotism, mother love, or any other of the deeply seated human qualities to motive their characters, usually do well both for player and audience. Plays with firmly drawn, broadly colored characters, directly expressed feelings, plenty of action, and solidly constructed situations of simple and primitively human emotions—tears or loud laughter, are of the type which the beginner can apprehend and carry through to the point of pretty capable and rounded execution. True, there is a rooted timidity on the part of perhaps the majority of amateurs with respect to scenes

of strong emotion and tender feeling. He fears, by failing to sustain them, to become merely ridiculous. But, as a matter of experience, it is more often the case that the average amateur rises to his best work in passages of just that description. It is closer to the truth to assert that more amateur plays fail because the sentiment is so slight, the fun so mild, the issues so unimportant, the whole so thin. It requires the highest professional skill to play a scene of slight and delicate texture and make anything of it at all. In unskilled hands such a scene becomes merely vapid and empty. No question but what it is capital practice for a couple of amateurs to study and practice the love scenes in "The School for Scandal"; but they can more completely realize and set forth the values of robuster scenes, as those between (for the sake of comparison) Petruchio and Katherine.

It is to be hoped that the appearance of utterly contradicting the sense of the preceding paragraph will be avoided, if a certain caution is appended to it. Plays of broad human appeal, by all means, whether grave or gay,—but this does not mean that the amateur actor has a license even to essay dramas where the theme and the handling involve the depiction of the great, heart-shaking tragic emotions of humanity that we have in "Lear," let us say, or in "Macbeth." Not only is any such attempt absurd, but it involves also the danger of fatal errors of an artistic sort. Such plays simply cannot be done by amateurs. The exotic quality and vast historical perspective of the Greek tragedies perhaps safeguard them well enough, and naturally their immense historical and literary values commend them to our modern study; but even so, it is a perilous matter for the average amateur to essay

one of those stupendous *rôles*. And it is perhaps not too much to assert that, if tragedy is the Scylla, farce is the Charybdis to be avoided. Take the opinion for what it is worth—perhaps it is not worth anything. But the view of many a stage manager, who hopes and works for an effective production, is that farce is fearfully risky—though it is the type of play toward which the amateur gravitates apparently by instinct. Farce is fearfully hard to play well. It may be fun for the actor, but those who have to witness the performance of the average amateur fun maker are only too apt to suffer sadly. It would seem as though nowhere is the gulf separating the amateur and the professional so wide and deep as just here. Our friends who are so funny when they do some parlor "stunt" after dinner, who are naturally so clever and so witty, nearly always fade and droop lamentably when

they attempt to romp through the mazes of "The Private Secretary," "Box and Cox," "All the Comforts of Home," "Lend Me Five Shillings," or "The Amazons," to name a few of the farces most commonly found on the amateur bills. Is there any spectacle sadder than the comedians in amateur musical plays? Those faint echoes of Joe Weber; those pale shadows of Harry Lauder, William Collier, or Eddie Foy! Good enough at home, but desperately thin and unsubstantial in the glare of the "foots." There is an unction, a drive, a curious personal magnetism, which are inseparable from effective acting of farce; there is an intimate knowledge of many extremely difficult technical tricks; there is ever so much in the facial play and the gesture, vitally important to the *farceur,* and in the vast majority of cases utterly outside the ability of the amateur. Broad farce per-

haps is inevitable; it is certainly legitimate. But one runs the risk of abysmal failure.

Paradoxically enough, amateurs can oftentimes attain remarkable success in plays which are written in a mood and in an idiom not quite that of the theater as we have come to know it. The earlier plays of Maeterlinck, such as "L'Interieur,"—plays of such delicate fabric that they express no more than an atmosphere or a mood; many of the plays of the modern Irishmen and modern Germans, to enumerate oddly different types, can be astonishingly well interpreted by those who are touched only faintly with the habitual, traditional methods of the stage, if they are intelligently and sympathetically handled by the stage manager. And that a choice of such plays, given favorable circumstances and the proper audience, is more than justified on the grounds of their exquisite literary and

very important historical qualities, goes without saying.

For these qualities of literary excellence and historical value should enter into the calculations of all those who wish to take the amateur stage at all seriously. It is understood that there is a tendency—and a stifling one!—to make too much of such elements in a play at the expense of the dramatic; and this we believe should be vigorously combated. The stage must have plays that can be acted. But, when possible, let us find these qualities present; let us make the very most of them. To exact a minimum of our author, let us insist, at least, that his language shall possess either fidelity to the time and the people he has chosen—that it shall have the tang of idiom and of crisp workmanship, or, if he writes in verse, let us insist that his verse have in it the genuine worth of real poetry. And going further—and di-

verging a little—let us urge that there is much to be said in favor of amateurs' trying their wings, whenever possible, in some of the plays of other times and other schools of the drama. Let nobody believe that this will take from the desired good times incident to rehearsal and preparation, for the contrary is the fact. It is not only infinitely more worth while, but it is a lot more fun, when all is said, to produce an Elizabethan play (like the "Fair Maid of the West"), a medieval mystery, or something from Molière (like "Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme" or "Les Femmes Savantes"), to name only a few of the ancient types, than perhaps most of the modern material available for amateurs. Played with a will, in accordance, so far as we understand them, with the conventions of the period, in every detail, an old-time drama of this sort will make rag-time comic opera and washy "he-and-

she" love stories appear thin and dull enough. One must acknowledge the danger of pedantry in such undertakings; but it is a question whether the advantages do not more than countervail the risks.

In choosing a play with a historical setting, written by a modern author, take care that the setting is faithful, that the theme and the language, the atmosphere and the physical details, are properly in keeping with the age which the play portrays, that the whole is consistent.

Whenever possible, select a play which will give fairly equal opportunities to each of the principal actors. This is confessedly very difficult; but it is not well to encourage the vanity of this or that amateur Duse or Irving by letting her or (occasionally!) him dominate a play, in a star part, to the belittling of the others. If you want to keep the interest of your actors going strong all through rehearsals,

give them all a chance at one good scene anyhow. Properly studied, nearly any play will reveal many opportunities in apparently inconspicuous parts for a clever character actor. Try to develop these to the limit. Remember always that what the amateur stage manager should try for is balance and general average excellence.

Since moral values vary so, and are so largely concerned and confused with taste, it is difficult to lay down in a positive manner any advice as to the choice of a play based on or involving the physical relation of the sexes. Young love, the tender relationships of old age, marital difficulties and reconciliations, forming as they do the theme of so many plays, can hardly be avoided, and need not. But difficulties arise nearly always when there is any question of selecting a play with a theme like that of "Monna Vanna," or "Iris," or any of the many light farces built around ad-

ventures in love. Probably they should be avoided, if only for their lack of that broad human appeal we laid down as a prerequisite, or, if not, for the fact that plays of this sort, to carry, must be played with a skill transcending that of the amateur many times. Generally speaking, however, there is not much likelihood of this type of play being selected at all or even considered, for obvious reasons. And another reason would be the fact that the natural diffidence most amateurs feel in playing even the simplest love scene would prove an effectual barrier against the choice of plays involving a display of deeper passion or light-hearted inconsequence.

With all diffidence, might one remind the amateurs in search of a suitable play of one limitation on that choice which is sometimes overlooked or disregarded? Let us be frank, and acknowledge that no

group of amateurs, however naturally talented and carefully rehearsed, can expect to compare in point of technical skill with professional actors. It is perfectly true that, given an equal training, a great many amateurs could take their places away from an equal number of "real" actors to-morrow. The amateur has an intelligence, an education, a range of culture, which, generally speaking, exceeds and excels that of his professional brother. He has had better opportunities. All he lacks is hard and prolonged drill in stage methods and conventions, in elocution and carriage. But, without this drill, lacking all but a surface knowledge of stage technique, he appears, whatever his natural ability, at a disadvantage. He cannot produce the effects; he cannot express thoughts and emotions; he cannot even walk about the stage. He can only approximate, when the professional can finish

and round, a scene. If there is any underestimate of the amateur's skill here, native or acquired, it is done with the one purpose of warning amateurs, as a rule, not to choose plays beyond their capabilities. Use some common sense in your selections. If your company is really experienced and pretty well versed, from many appearances, in something more than the rudiments of stage technique, this caution can be fairly disregarded, and you need not hesitate to select a play which brings you into direct competition with a professional tradition. This, because the freshness and spirit, the conscientiousness and the intelligence of the actors furnish a secure enough basis to build on. But if your company is made up of beginners, however keen, tread softly. Remember that you can accomplish results only between very circumscribed lines, and do not try for too much. Better a good performance

of a simple play than a partial or complete failure and wreck with a difficult play. See what your "leading lady" can do with a piece like "Cousin Kate" before you encourage her to essay Rosalind.

III

ORGANIZATION

If we suppose the play has been selected, the dates of the production settled, and everybody concerned ready to begin preparations, the matter of proper and not too elaborate organization presents itself for consideration. For it is idle to expect good results on the night of performance unless all the machinery needed for launching the play is in good running order. Certain duties must be assigned to certain individuals; there must be a thorough preparation of the text of the play; the cast and the understudies must be chosen; the general executive work both of the stage and of the box office must all be portioned off and set in motion. And all this must be attended to before re-

hearsals begin, for the sake of comfort and ease and efficiency all combined. Probably all these details of preparation and organization will be undertaken by some executive committee of the club or school. But however the arrangements are made, let them be in the hands of clear-headed persons who work without any fussing.

THE STAGE MANAGER

The very first thing to attend to, in preparing for an amateur play, is to select the very best *Stage Manager* available. On this point there can be absolutely no discussion. Without a stage manager, you can get no good results. Unless rehearsals are conducted and directed by some one outside the cast, who can look at the thing from the outside, there is absolutely no use trying. It is not too much to say that in amateur plays, though he does not appear at the performance, the stage

manager is of far more importance than the most talented actor. On him rests the main responsibility for the play's success or failure.

What about his duties and his position?

The stage manager is the ruler of rehearsals, the mainspring of the whole performance, and from his decisions there is no appeal. It is only on this understanding that he should accept the post. It is his conception of the play which is produced; it is he who says that the actors shall speak and move thus and so; his directions even as to *minutiæ* of make-ups and costumes which are to be carried out loyally. Naturally, if the interest of the actors is awake, if the members of the club or the school have certain ideas they would like to see carried out, they will be glad enough to offer suggestions in the proper way and proper spirit, and the stage man-

ager will doubtless be able and glad to make use of many of them. A capital co-operation is possible, with the exercise of tact on both sides. But it must be clearly apprehended that the man who directs and is responsible, is the man who has the final word without argument. While he will welcome suggestions, he must not abate his authority for an instant. The actors are to do as he directs; his ideas as to the details of the production are to be accepted without question. Assistance he must have, but never interference. Choose somebody for the position of stage manager in whom entire confidence may be placed, and then let him go ahead with a free hand.

And there must be one stage manager, not several. No amateur play was ever anything but a weariness to the flesh for the actors and a trial of patience to the audience, which was attempted with a

"committee" in charge of rehearsals and performance.

Sometimes the stage manager is called the "coach," and, as such, his work is limited practically to training the actors in reading lines and in the rudiments of stage deportment. But a broader and truer conception of his duties, based on a better understanding of the stage manager's position on the professional stage, is gradually coming to prevail; and this makes the place one of supreme importance and authority. We should think of the stage manager just as we think of the conductor of an orchestra. As the latter "reads" a symphony, so the former "reads" a play. Both are interpreters. Each has a clear and personal conception of *tempi,* values, shadings of all kinds; each makes use of his performers to express this conception with what skill and perfectness is possible. Just as the musical director makes use of

the varied qualities and powers of wood winds, strings, and brasses, blending them all in such relations as he believes will best express the meaning and character of the composition, so the stage manager endeavors to blend into a homogeneous and intricately patterned single effect, the personalities of the cast, the scenery, lights, costumes, accessories, and the text of the play. Each has a task far greater and far more worth while than merely to instruct the various groups of musicians, or the several actors ranged before him, how best to perform their several parts.

Thus conceived, the position of stage manager will require a pretty capable person to fill it. While there is no need for him to be an accomplished actor, any more than there is need for a conductor to be a *virtuoso* on the violin or the flute, he must have a good knowledge of the effect he wants any individual actor to produce and

be able to explain it. He must have reading enough and imagination enough to grasp intelligently and with sympathy the pictorial, historical, or dramatic values of any given scene. He must have enough artistic instinct and training to arrange masses and smaller compositions of figures effectively. He must have as full a technical knowledge of stage limitations and exigencies as may be. Most of all, the stage manager must have that curious gift or trait called personality which makes it easy for other persons to obey him, and that fellow-gift which enables a man to see his own ideas clearly and to transmit them to others. Was it by oversight that no mention has been made of good temper and civility? Plenty of good stage managers have neither; but in the long run it is the patient man with a quiet voice who gets results, not the noisy person or the nagger.

THE STAFF

Since the duties of staging even a simple play are, after all, both complex and manifold, it is very necessary to make a division of them, from the beginning of organization. While the stage manager must have supreme authority, it is plain that he will require assistance. Not from any "committee," be it said again. His help must come from regularly appointed staff officers, so to call them, each with a special and limited group of duties to attend to.

These officers are:—

Business Manager
Stage Carpenter
Property Master
Electrician
Prompter (or Assistant Stage Manager).

To the *Business Manager* must be delegated all the work connected with what, in

professional jargon, is called "the front of the house." Such duties as supplying press notices, printing and advertising, programs, seat sale, patroness list, the engaging of orchestra and ushers, are, in general, those which fall to his share, together with all work incident to the handling of tickets and the checking up of accounts.

The *Stage Carpenter,* under orders of the stage manager, provides, sets up, and shifts the scenery and stage settings, raises and lowers the curtain, has general charge of what may be called the mechanical side of the production. His crew of four or five helpers will be divided into "grips," who handle the standing sets of scenery, and the "flymen," who from the fly gallery raise and lower drops and ceilings and any special things like extra strip lights or borders which are handled from aloft. The stage manager must provide the car-

penter with a full *Scene Plot,* showing the diagram of the stage and a full description and enumeration of the pieces of scenery needed for each act.

The *Property Master* (good old "Props," most fertile of contrivers, true son of Autolycus!) provides and cares for, also places in the proper place for use, every article needed by the characters of the play in the course of the action, except costumes. Bob Acres's dueling pistols, Lady Macbeth's candle, the telephone instruments, letters, table ware, daggers, telegraph blanks, glasses of wine or vials of poison (cold tea in either case!), the pens and ink, the thousand and one things which are handled, referred to, lost, found, destroyed or discovered in the thousand and one plays of record,—all of them fall to the lot of worthy "Props" to be borrowed or stolen for the performance. For never, according to ancient and accepted

tradition, does "Props" buy anything he can get by means dark and devious. Personal properties, so called,—an eye glass, a ring, a handkerchief, say—used by only a single character and carried on his person, are usually looked out for by the actor himself. The responsibility of "Props" to have every needed thing exactly in its place at the right moment does not usually extend to the oversight of these few articles. He is provided with a complete list of properties required.

The *Electrician,* who must have a thorough knowledge of electrical work, provides and manipulates all the lights of whatever sort, as the requirements of the play demand. He must be provided by the stage manager with a *Light Plot,* which accurately shows when and where (by means of suitable cues) sunrises, moonlight, grate fires, and similar special lighting effects are needed by the action

of the play, also what colors and degrees of illumination from footlights, borders, strip lights, spot lights, at all times, so he can have his wiring and connections arranged in plenty of time.

The duties of the *Prompter,* who may also be the stage manager's handy man, are specifically to stand throughout the performance, script in hand and eyes on the script, ready to supply instantly the necessary words to an actor forgetting his lines. Naturally he must be thoroughly familiar with the play,—not only with the text, but also through constant attendance at rehearsals, with the pace and the manner of performance. Thus, he must not confuse an intentional pause on the actor's part with a possible forgetfulness. He must know the play so well, that, if an actor skips a page or so by mistake (which happens in the best regulated stage families), he can turn without hesitation to the place

at which the errant one returns to the fold. As handy man, the prompter may properly be asked to see that the actors have the copies of the text and the few properties which are often necessary at rehearsals, he may often be of service in planning scenery and costumes, during the performance he may act as call boy, warning the actors of the time when an act will be called; all the way through, he should be at the stage manager's call for the thousand small offices occurring at each rehearsal. Thankless work, but mighty useful, that of the prompter!

It should be noted that none of these staff officers should take part in the play being produced. They fill responsible and busy positions, all of them, which will take all the time and thought any amateur may fairly be expected to expend. In all dramatic clubs, it is a capital plan for the members to take turns acting and

helping "back stage," or "out in front" (in the box office). Knowledge of every department of the work of that quaintly complicated institution, the theater, has a real value, of one sort or another.

SELECTING THE CAST

Whenever possible, as in the case of a school or college dramatic society with a large membership, the cast of a play should be selected by means of very exhaustive tryouts. This is a democratic method; it is as fair as any other; it promotes a capital and healthy rivalry; it starts the play off with the very real advantage of having a cast which is probably very keen for the work in hand. Trials may be as prolonged and as exhaustive as one pleases; but their object, it is believed, should be (1) to determine any given aspirant's fitness to appear in the particular play in hand at all, and (2) his

or her suitability for this or that particular rôle. The first set of tests, that is, will tend to bring out a given actor's probable capacity for (say) eighteenth century comedy, and will reveal his entire unsuitability (perhaps) for rural melodrama; will show in him the makings of a capital low comedian; will make evident his utter incapacity for doing any of the rôles in "Lady Windermere's Fan." By this means also the hopelessly unfit will be weeded out promptly. The second set of tests, however, will bring candidates for any given rôle into healthy and keen competition directly with one another.

In establishing any set of standards by which to judge candidates, some attention will have to be paid to an aspirant's *physical suitability* for the part. A great deal of nonsense, of course, is talked in these days about this matter of selecting only "types." Many forget that skillful

make-up and a talent for impersonation will enable a good actor to appear most creditably in parts for which nature, to judge from his physical conformation, never intended him. But he whose figure was fashioned for a Falstaff can hardly fill the eye of the critical in the part of a Mercutio; the girl who looks like a Lydia Languish is at a disadvantage if she aspires to play Lady Macbeth. Character parts, generally speaking, depend less on natural physical qualifications than other parts; it is perfectly right to depend on the make-up box to help build up an impersonation; it is safe to say that one may grant considerable leeway in the matter at all times. But in parts which demand of the actor perfectly obviously necessary physical traits, such as beauty, grace, muscular strength, height, littleness, leanness or solidity, candidates not possessing them should usually be passed over.

It is well also to take into account the natural quality of the candidate's voice, its flexibility, its control.

Lastly, judge the candidates in the beginning on their natural intelligence in conceiving the part they wish to essay. Not alone should they look their parts (which make-up will assist in), read the lines decently (where good training will work wonders), but they must *feel* the part. They must reveal from the outset that they have some sort of a conception (even a wrong one, if only it is clean cut) both of the nature of the character and of the general way and means by which the character can be expressed. One grants, of course, that it is asking a great deal of the amateur, with his meager technical resources, to outline a character at all convincingly. Your professional knows (or should know!) all the conventional tricks of speech and bearing by which at

least obvious characteristics are revealed, and so from the beginning has an advantage denied the amateur. But the latter, if he has any natural sense of stage delineation, or any realization of the nature of his part, will nearly always, however crudely and imperfectly, reveal enough of it to rank him above or below his rivals. If he has the sense of his part, good coaching will do wonders for him. If he lacks it, the best stage manager alive cannot give it to him. Look for something positive all along the line.

As a general rule (to leave those standards based on natural fitness), it will be found most satisfactory to try out candidates for a play on a basis of their mastery of parts similar to those they wish to undertake, chosen from some other piece. If, for instance, it is intended to present "The Rivals," try out the candidates with "She Stoops to Conquer." If "The Impor-

tance of Being Earnest" (inevitable production by amateurs!) is the play, candidates may profitably appear in passages from some other of the Wilde comedies. Thus a candidate's general ability is tested. The man who can play "Tony Lumpkin" can probably play "Bob Acres"; a good "Mrs. Malaprop" will usually satisfy as "Mrs. Hardcastle."

The field of candidates being reduced by these preliminary trials, one has the pick left to compete for places in the real production.

Since the stage manager has the responsibility for the production, and, better than anybody else, knows just what values he wishes to secure,—knows just how the play, like the symphony or the opera, is going to be conducted, he should certainly have a vote in the selection of the cast. And in any case, the board of judges should not exceed three.

It is eagerly hoped that the competitive method of choosing a cast will extend more and more among amateurs. That it ever will be adopted depends almost entirely on the spirit with which the work of the play is taken up. If only amusement and a pleasant fillip to one's vanity are sought, there is nothing to be said. One clever woman, two or three pretty ones, a couple of patient husbands or old bachelors, together with a sprinkling of personable youths, will suffice for nearly any play—of the usual amateur sort. They will all be told how well they did, and how funny it was when they forgot their lines. They will probably wear their costumes at the supper and the dancing which will follow the performance, and all will be well. But if the amateur performers are really touched with the notion, now spreading, that it is well worth while to make their performance approach a very definite and

very worthy artistic ideal, they will be willing to put aside the traditional amateur eagerness for self glorification for the sake of obtaining a result really good. And any method, competitive trial or other, which will bring out native talent, and will evidence that a certain actor will fill a place better than another, contributes to this end very considerably.

Obviously desirable of establishment in schools and colleges which make anything of their dramatic work, the competitive choosing of candidates serves even better in amateur clubs. By checking vanity, and dispelling illusions, it will either disrupt the club altogether or make it all the stronger.

Lastly, it is always well to choose, in addition to the regular cast, understudies for all the principal parts in the play. The understudies should be present at all rehearsals, must be letter perfect in their

parts, and at the time of the performance, ready to go on at a moment's notice.

THE SCRIPT

The script is the name given to the manuscript or printed version of the play, as used in rehearsal and all through the work of preparation. Little attention is usually given to the manner of preparing it for the use of amateurs, so a word or two of caution regarding it may not be amiss in any consideration of the effective and economical ways of staging an amateur production.

There are two ways prevalent of preparing the text of a play for the use of members of the cast. Ancient amateur precedent leads one to purchase a complete text for each actor,—and this is the wrong way. An equally venerable custom (of the professional stage) limits the possession of the complete text to the stage

manager; it presents to each actor nothing but a copy of his lines and cues together with enough "business," as shown in stage directions, to show him his successive positions on the stage, exits and entrances.

The latter method is the one which always should be employed. With only his lines to study and read, the actor is not distracted; he can form no independent (and possibly mutinous) notions about how the play should be conducted as a whole. For a while, until probably the third or fourth rehearsal, he will not even understand how his part in a scene or a picture is related to the other parts. His condition is very like that of the musician in some concerted piece. His score contains only his own music. For so many bars he is told to play; then he is bidden to rest for a certain number of bars. What the other instruments are doing is not his affair at all. If he works in a kind of igno-

rance, at the same time he is never confused. It is also far easier to memorize an acting part thus prepared.

Another advantage which this method of preparing the text presents, resides in the fact that it gives a free hand and a clear start to the stage manager. If he alone knows the composition of the various scenes, the relations of the characters, the values all the way through the play, he can move his actors from the very beginning like so many puppets. He will be unhampered by suggestion, criticism, or dissent. From the very outset, he can rehearse intelligently and with swift directness of purpose.

It can be argued, of course, that reading all the text gives a so much clearer view to the actors of what the play is all about. "It's so stupid, having only my own lines"; "I feel so silly at rehearsal, not knowing at all what the others are going to do."

These wails are familiar enough. But is it not enough to say, in rebuttal, that the best professional usage gives the whole text to the manager alone? Suppose all the players in a symphony orchestra had the complete orchestral score to study their parts from! It is just as absurd for every actor in a play to have the complete text before him.

The director, as he studies the text of the play, and during the unfolding process incident to rehearsal, will write out for his own guidance every scrap of business for every character; clear diagrams of the successive tableaux; full directions as to the manner of reading speeches; every detail of tone or action, which will help him to arrange each step of the production effectively. Let him remember that the action of the play is fully as important in developing its dramatic and picturesque significance as the words of the characters;

the action is to the text what the orchestral parts of an opera are to the libretto. And the stage manager, like his brother the musical conductor, must have before him an absolutely complete "score."

When all these annotations are made, or even at the beginning of rehearsals, have the text typewritten with double spaces between each speech, and single spaces between the lines of each speech, with the names of the characters in any given scene printed in the middle of the page (instead of at the left hand margin). If possible, use a bichrome ribbon; one color for the text, another color for the stage directions; or, if only one color ink is used, all stage directions must be underscored in red. Stage directions which have to do with general movements, exits and entrances, important changes of position, and all significant bits of business, together with clear indications of the *tempo* of every scene,

should be written on the right side of the page only, in columns or blocks half a page wide. Directions for individual characters, like those for a certain inflection for a certain speech, or for less important bits of business affecting only single individuals, should be written integrally (in parentheses and contrasting color) with the speech they accompany. Leave ample margins on the typewritten page for the changes in business which the experience of rehearsals will inevitably suggest. For the sake of easy handling and reference, it is best to have each act of the typewritten text bound up separately.

For convenient study and handling, the parts as prepared for the actors are typewritten on sheets half the ordinary typewriter size, and stoutly bound. The cues are written on the right side of the page, and consist of as much as four words; the stage directions are printed in connection

with the speeches as in the full sized text.

All this takes a little time, and perhaps entails for a full sized play a cost of twenty dollars at ordinary rates. But the expense is more than compensated by the ease and speed with which the whole matter of study and rehearsal is helped along.

REHEARSALS

One further point to be considered in connection with the work of preparing for the production of an amateur play, so far as organization is concerned, is that of arranging for rehearsals.

Perhaps the commonest source of weakness in amateur productions, other than unintelligent training or lack of talent, lies in the manner in which rehearsals are planned and conducted. Many a play fails, after a tremendous amount of energy, good will, time, and money have been spent in preparation, merely because

those in charge have been ignorant of, or have neglected, two or three fundamental requirements, of a simple sort, making for good discipline. In what follows, no excuse is made for a certain dogmatic attitude; no apology for laying down rules and regulations. Less than what is here suggested would ensure no results at all, save those which luck and the holy angels grant to sinners. Wherever the word "should" appears, the reader will please supply a "must," as better conveying the writer's idea.

Let us suppose the play is chosen, the cast selected, and the date of production definitely determined. Then the stage manager takes command. And his very first duty is to draw up, preferably not in consultation with his actors, a schedule of rehearsal dates, a copy of which is handed to each member of the company. Let the manager announce, when first the actors

are called together, that the days and hours selected for rehearsal are to be considered fixtures—engagements to which he and his troupe are definitely committed. He should say that he expects all other engagements for the ensuing week to give way to rehearsals; he should assume from the outset that everybody in the play has enough interest and good will to conform to his requirements. Naturally, the manager will use both sense and tact in preparing his schedule; rehearsals must not be made to appear a burden and a bore from the start. Let him find out quietly how his company is situated as to their other fixed weekly engagements, whether business or social. If possible he should avoid conflict with social events to which many of his troupe are invited or hope to be. It is safe to assume that the work and fun of preparing the play will not appeal to all his actors with equal force. So he

may settle his rehearsal periods as not to make them onerous to anybody.

But it must be made perfectly clear that *rehearsals are engagements which must be kept.* There must be no leeway for the shirker; good and conscientious workers must not be hampered by the absence or tardiness of others.

It is probably impossible, in the average amateur club or even at a school, to provide any acceptable penalty for absence or slackness in the matter of rehearsals. The rigid system of fines charged against the salaries of professionals who absent themselves without the very best excuses, will not of course apply to amateur companies; and such penalties as being dropped from the cast, and the like, usually defeat their own ends. It is far better, and perfectly possible in any group of amateurs, to cultivate an *esprit de corps* which makes it the right and reasonable

thing for the actor always to be present. Let it be made clear that absences make effective rehearsals impossible; let there be cultivated a real desire never to miss, both for the sake of the production, which all want to make as good as possible, and for the sake of the fun which any tactful director can get out of the dryest rehearsal, if he keeps his wits about him.

While it is quite impossible to lay down hard and fast rules as to the period of time necessary to rehearse an amateur play, certain general notions as to this point may be suggested. Where talents and experience vary indefinitely; where ideals of the perfection to be attained range all the way from those of the manager and cast who seriously attempt a production and performance as close to the professional as possible, to those which are contented and attained when the prompter's voice is not too often heard and the

girls look pretty in their costumes, nobody can say that two weeks is enough or two months insufficient. But it may safely be said that amateurs, except the very crudest, appear to accomplish satisfactory results most often, other things being equal, when rehearsals do not extend over a period exceeding six weeks. A longer stretch of preparation is apt to result in flagging interest, desultory attendance, and encourages the feeling from the start that when "the play" is so far distant, "there is plenty of time." One inclines to the belief that one month is better than two. Another set of reasons for an apparently short period of rehearsal is based on the fact that average amateurs can be trained to secure only a limited number of effects, can realize only a limited number of "values." Thoroughly grounded professional actors need, paradoxically, almost more rehearsal than amateurs; when

it is a question of attaining the utmost perfection of stage effect, of expressing every slightest *nuance* of meaning or picturesque quality, there can be hardly too much practice. But with amateurs one can plan to accomplish only a few things. One may do these things very surprisingly well, it is true. But to learn them is a matter of a comparatively short time.

What must be carefully observed, however, in the matter of planning rehearsals, and the time they are to consume, is that once begun, rehearsals must come very frequently. It will not do to meet casually once a week for a while, and then scramble feverishly on the eve of the production. Rehearsals should never occur less often than three times a week. During the week immediately preceding the public performance, they must be held every day.

Furthermore, rehearsals must be long to the point of weariness, and a little past it. A period shorter than two full hours must never be allowed, with work going every second of the time. The afternoon rehearsal which is interrupted for tea at five, the evening rehearsal at which the hostess appears smilingly and casually to inquire if the actors "aren't ready to come into the dining room," are taboo. Rehearsals must mean unflagging hard work.

STUDY

Another point to be insisted on in the early stages of organizing a good amateur play relates to intelligent study. Before and during the progress of rehearsals, both Stage Manager and actors must make every effort to realize and understand the period, setting, and circumstances, in which the story of the play is laid. Frequently disregarded on the American pro-

fessional stage, the *milieu,* or environment and color, of the play should be a matter of painstaking study by the amateur player and producer.

This is not limited merely to an attempt at correct costuming and setting. A complete realization of the spirit of the play will affect the carriage and speech of the actors. How often do we hear Lydia Languish speak in the accent of Broadway or of the Lake Shore Drive! How often does a soldier of the Empire carry himself like a bank clerk going to luncheon!

Look at the portraits, the pictures of domestic life, of the period and country in which your play is laid. Every public library, gallery, and museum can help you. Get in mind how the people looked. Understand clearly the characteristics of the rancher's shack, the Puritan dwelling, the Bronx apartment, the business office, the

palace, the typical air and manner of their inhabitants. Make every member of the cast appreciate and faithfully mimic (as best he can) the tone and gait of the *type* of character he is to present. One must not be content merely to let the people in the play be themselves—they must get out of themselves. They must not speak the language of the play's period and place merely by rote; they must not dress in mere approximations of the correct costume. Let the performance reproduce a bit of vivid life; let it catch the spirit of the life it undertakes to reproduce. Too high an ideal? Hardly, if amateur acting and producing is to be made at all worth while.

It is along this line that the educational value of studying a play and acting it becomes very evident. This matter of study, both of text and of character and of setting, may be elaborated as far as is

thought wise. Schools jump at the opportunity. But it is well to remember that a great deal of absurd effort is expended on this cultural aspect of the business. One remembers to have seen a recommendation to the effect that, preceding the production of a play of literary value or interest, somebody shall precede the performance with a brief lecture on the play's content and place in literary history! The recommendation to intelligent study here set down has for its object merely a better performance—which appears, after all, the main business in hand.

IV

REHEARSING

THE DIVISION OF THE TEXT

THE play is selected, the cast chosen, the first rehearsal is called, and the work of the stage manager starts with a rush. From this moment, the actors will look to him for direction at every point; he alone must solve all difficulties. Tactfully and unobtrusively, but very positively, he is to keep the reins in his own hands. Even if he makes a mistake, he should not correct it till he is quite ready. Experience abundantly proves that it is better to follow out even a quite wrong conception of a scene's value and purport than to vacillate between two or three ways of reading it. Uncertainty on the part of the manager

will result very swiftly in a loss of all confidence by the actors, both in the manager and in themselves. But confidence has been and won and kept before now by even the tone and manner of authority.

How proceed effectively then toward the fulfillment of the manager's really complex task, as this will present itself during the progress of rehearsals?

In the first place—and it may appear superfluous to ask this till one gets to know the run of amateur managers—he must study the play with genuine care and thoroughness. He must know the play better than any of his actors. He must come to every rehearsal with a well planned campaign in mind; he must be prepared, from real intimacy with the play, to explain unhesitatingly any point, as he understands it, on which a question may be raised. The actors have only their bare parts; the Stage Manager has the

whole text; and the great advantage which this arrangement gives him, he should maintain carefully. And this he can accomplish only by a study which, before rehearsals have progressed far, will make him quite competent to recount if not to act each of the various parts.

For the purpose of really intelligent study and rehearsal, it will be found necessary to divide the text of the play into its various component parts. Before rehearsals begin, have clearly in mind what, dramatically, are the important moments. The habit of the French dramatists, who compose a new scene on the basis of the entrance of any important character, gives us a good example of division, which we shall do well to follow out to its logical end. Not only do we not study each act as a whole—a very common amateur fault; not only do we refuse to consider each scene (for the moment) as a unit; but we

accurately mark off by itself every episode, incident, speech or gesture, which decisively helps to advance the plot, depicts character, or affords opportunity for development as a beautiful stage picture. Every entrance and exit, every encounter of principal characters; individual speeches; bits of action of all sorts which have color and interest,—as minute incidents as any of these, all through each act of the play, must be treated as separate problems and studied each for its own sake. This is vitally important.

"VALUES"

Only in this way, by careful dissection and separate study, will it be possible to discover what are technically called the play's "values." These, in translation, are the scores of opportunities for expressive acting, for artistic grouping, for realizing the full meaning and measure of the

author's material. It is partly due to the amateur's habit of rehearsing great stretches of the play at a time that he passes heedlessly over "values" which the professional would welcome and make much of. And while it is impossible for the amateur, with his scanty technical equipment, to realize all that is presented to him, he must take care at least to get out as many of these "values" as he possibly can. And it is one of the early tasks of the stage manager to see these varied possibilities, of whatever character, and indicate them to his company. He must make his actors perceive that to read a line, make an entrance, leave the stage, hand a letter, or play any single bit of action, in a given way, is better than to do it otherwise. Better, because it will reveal more vividly the emotion or feeling underlying the action; better because it is fun-

nier; better because it is richer and fuller; better because it expresses the fullness of the "value."

Until the players clearly apprehend each "value" as the latter presents itself, and begin to express it, the prudent manager will not advance his rehearsal a peg. Make the heroine take an entrance twenty times, if necessary, "till she gets it right," —till she expresses, that is, the dramatic value and point of her appearance. Rehearse an inch at a time. It will not prove tedious, if properly managed. There is a lot of fun, for a really worth while company, in finding and expressing "values" in unsuspected places. A slight change of inflection in reading a speech, a chance handling of some object lying on a table, may open up whole ranges of interesting possibilities for better and richer interpretation of the play.

EMPHASIS

It will be apparent enough, on study, that the action of each of the little subdivisions of the play is built around some central happening—a speech, the handling of a weapon, a fan, a letter, perhaps upon a single gesture or an attitude. In a single instant of time perhaps, or in a very brief bit of movement or speech, resides the whole point of the incident; and to this focus of interest the attention of the audience must be drawn and there fixed. These succeeding moments must be played with emphasis; they must be given the most vivid depiction possible.

Given good actors, one would fancy that this particular problem would be solved in advance. To make a point tell would appear to be wholly the task of the players, not at all that of the stage manager. But the experience of even the professional

stage testifies that this vastly important work of expressing "values" depends, for its successful accomplishment, not wholly on the skill of the actor, but in a great degree on the manner in which the actors are disposed and moved on the stage. Not *how* they stand and speak, but *where* they stand and speak, is a very serious consideration; and much is made of it here, because so many amateur stage managers are careless about it.

For it must be always remembered that, to make a point tell, the incident must be given a pronounced physical relief. It must have the emphasis derived from being conspicuous. The audience must hear and see it. Whatever else the stage may hold of interest at that moment must be distinctly subordinated to the emphatic and vivid presentation of the really important action.

The traditional, and usually most ef-

fective way of securing this actual physical relief, so very necessary, is to give the actors playing the incident a marked measure of isolation on the stage. Separate them from the others. Do not be afraid of giving them a stronger illumination than the other less important actors receive, for the moment. Let them play their "bit," as it were, all by themselves. Deliberately withdraw other actors from their immediate neighborhood, by sending them upstage or into corners, if necessary. The attention of the audience must be focussed and held on one single point; and to this end let the actors carrying the scene be made physically conspicuous by every means. One must not forget, of course, that the arrangement of the characters in any stage picture requires a pretty constant balance; no part or side of the stage should remain unpeopled altogether, broadly speaking. Indeed there are

many times when the stage will be "dressed" as symmetrically, almost, as the compositions of the old religious painters. But it is also true that this desirable balance is not always one of masses. It depends also on interest and significance; a single important character doing something important is actually weightier and larger, if one may use the expression, than a whole crowd of unimportant persons. And so, it is perfectly proper, if you wish to emphasize the action of one or two important characters at any given moment, to set them quite by themselves on one side of the stage, filling the other with twenty lesser personages, if need be. A hero facing a mob; Shylock in the court scene; Hamlet addressing the players; many another scene of like sort recurs to the memory as illustrating the truth that a principal character, at any important moment, may and should be given all

needful isolation, with no fear of disturbing the general balance of the picture. On making important entrances and exits, this physical relief, through isolation, is carefully to be sought and arranged for. Here, and indeed in general, for this purpose of making certain persons conspicuous, the triangle is accepted as suggesting the best arrangement in which to group the various actors. The apex of the triangle is the focus of interest. To this one focus all the lines of the stage are made to lead.

Necessary emphasis through physical relief is also secured by playing all important incidents in the foreground of the picture. Occasionally the exigencies of the story will make it inevitable that a place somewhat less conspicuous be chosen; but, whenever possible, stage all important action well down, on that third of the stage which is nearest the footlights. Whenever possible, moreover, choose

places somewhat to the right or left of the center of the stage (at R. C. or L. C. in stage parlance). If two incidents of equal interest and closely connected in theme occur within the limits of the same act, play one at R. C., and the other at L. C., for the sake of proper variety, and, also, that both sides of "the house" shall have an opportunity to see directly in front of it one incident or the other. Amateurs, if left to themselves, are apt to play too far back on the stage. Bring them down and keep them there, especially when they have anything important to say or do.

MOVEMENT

With the play divided up into a series of incidents, of dramatic moments, it will be seen that the movements of the actors about the stage amount to nothing more than movement from one tableau or stage picture to another. And the sooner this

fact is made apparent to the amateur company and heartily accepted as furnishing the reason for crossing, going up, and coming down, the better. Hamlet, say, makes his first entrance in the train of the king and queen. This is one incident, staged, prepared, rehearsed as a separate, single episode. The royal pair mount the throne, Hamlet proceeds to his seat opposite them. This is another incident. A few seconds later, he is listening to the hollow and pompous address of his mother's guilty consort,—a third incident. And the actors are drilled first into such a disposition as will make Hamlet's entrance effective; next they are moved to furnish a background and setting for the principals as they take their respective places; finally they move into a formation proper for the third of these three typical moments of rapidly changing action. All the people on the stage, from the star down

to the meanest courtier of Elsinore, make no change or movement save those required by the exigencies of the play's action; the stage is dressed at every instant to give the important people and the important action the necessary physical relief, and to present a composition which is pleasing and effective on the picturesque side. In the carefully written texts of the modern playwright, and always in the script of the good stage manager, the positions of all principal actors are clearly prescribed for every moment they are on the stage; and, on study, it will be seen that they move only for reasons springing from the necessities of the plot.

The amateur stage manager will find it a great help if he directs his actors in their movement solely on this basis. The tendency of all amateur actors is toward restlessness. They feel, if they stand still, that they appear stiff and wooden; they

fear that the scene lacks animation. And this is a tendency to be corrected and a fear to be allayed, very early in the game. Not a step is to be taken on the stage which is not required by the action of the play. Make your people learn to keep still. An aimless change of position, even an alteration in the general poise and pose of the body, will definitely injure, by blurring, the sharp impression every instant of the play must make on the audience. Make the actors keep their hands down, their feet from shuffling; do not let them sit down or stand up save for some reason in the play. Repose must be the object sought,—this and the elimination of all needless movement of all sorts. The effect of this will be that when an actor does change his pose, or cross the stage, his action becomes significant; there is definition and crispness in his playing; his action takes on a proper emphasis. The ama-

teur's native nervousness will make the enforcement of this rule extremely difficult; but the stage manager must insist on it from the start. Remember that it is far better to appear wooden than woolly.

There is one good way of correcting this fault of nervous indecision and restlessness, the results of which are so uniformly fatal. When a certain disposition of the characters in any scene has been found after repeated experiments and rehearsal, to satisfy all the requirements of emphasis, picturesqueness and the play's story, compel the actors to assume exactly the places assigned them, every time they rehearse. Settle the matter as early as possible; do not attempt too many refinements and slight changes of formation (which will merely confuse); and then have your company repeat and repeat not only the speeches but also every detail of the action and movement without an inch or shadow

of variation. Their positions on the stage, their individual poses, the intonation of their lines, must come to be taken automatically. They must get so used to doing and saying things in only one way that any suggested change will dismay and shock them. To venture a paradox, one rehearses a company into acting intelligently only by rehearsing them to move mechanically. Secondly, as a further guard against uncertainty of movement, not only must the actors get this idea of never varying their play at any given moment; but they should be compelled always to move across the stage, whenever they *do* move, in exactly one way, by a never changing route, in a uniform lapse of time, even, if possible, by the same number of steps. Experiment will show how best to effect the change; and when once any best method is adopted, do not vary it by a hair's breadth. The doing of the

thing thus and so must become instinctive. Precision is the aim, clear outlines, bold color. And these ends can be gained only by a repetition, which is perfectly mechanical. Improvisation, individual departures from what is adopted as the understood "business" of any bit of action, should be, for amateurs, as much out of the question as individual initiative on the part of the soldier in a parade formation.

TIME AND RHYTHM

If you have had the opportunity of watching a really first class stage manager at rehearsal, it may be that you have wondered at his listening to the actors, as they go through a scene, with his eyes closed, or with his back turned to the stage. Again you will notice, probably with a bit of surprise, that very frequently the manager will beat out a kind of marching rhythm—clapping his hands together, or,

more likely, using as a baton his tattered, dog's eared copy of the script. And if you interrupt that manager during either of these two phases of his madness, you are courting instant and violent death. Break in on him at any other time,—when he is laboring with an actor to speak louder, or when he is insisting that the electrician shall supply some lighting effect which the latter swears the switchboard will not carry, for instance—and the manager will probably answer you, for he lives by and in spite of all interruptions. But when, with every nerve taut, he is listening to the reading of a scene for the purpose of exactly fixing its *time*, or is whacking out "one—two—three—four," in order to get his actors into the *rhythm* of the scene, keep away from him. He is dangerous. He is trying to accomplish that which many would call his most delicate and difficult task. For, if that manager knows

anything, he knows that every subdivision of the play, act, or scene, must be taken at a certain pace, time, and cadence, which is constantly changing—now quickened, now retarded, but always appropriate. And to make even the most experienced actors strike, maintain, and deftly change the pace deemed right, is work for a man with all his wits about him, his most sensitive perceptions all awake and on tip-toe.

But it is work that must be done. It is work often neglected, through ignorance, by amateurs. The audience at an amateur play, often the actors themselves as well, will feel a sense of oppressive monotony in the way the play is being done. They will try to relieve this by varying their tones, the pitch of their voices, their manner of playing; they will fall into the habit of moving about merely for the sake of moving. And they commit many sins for the sake, as they hope, of offsetting a

deadly one. But all these efforts are quite vain. Variety, and the charm which variety brings, also the effect of really intelligent reading and interpretation, is more often a matter of varying the time and rhythm intelligently, than of any other device. The feeling that amateurs are playing a scene too glibly, or too slowly, is always traceable to the fact that they have chosen the wrong pace, the wrong *tempo*, as stage jargon phrases it.

While it is easy enough to insist that this question receive the most careful consideration, it is extremely difficult to lay down fixed and workable rules for the amateur manager to go by. There will be considerable divergence of opinion between equally skillful directors as to the proper speed at which any given passage shall be taken. What obtains in the sphere of music is equally true on the stage; one conductor will read an orchestral composition

at quite a different rate of speed than his brother or rival, and lacking the author to judge between them, who shall say which has the best interpretation? Again, special circumstances may intervene to determine the manager to call for a pace slower or quicker than usual. But if we can agree, broadly speaking, that the character of the given passage determines the pace at which it shall be played, we are on fairly safe ground. We may also agree on some other generalizations. Thus, it is reasonable to say that scenes which tell the play's story, which depict a crisis of character, which are full of suspense either humorous or deeply stirring, shall always be taken slowly. Scenes which are obviously intended by the playwright, or seized by the actor, as opportunities for extended individual character drawing, should also proceed slowly. Recall, for instance, the deliberation with

which Jefferson played that memorable passage, a classic of comedy acting, where as Bob Acres he prepared himself for the duel. Perhaps there is no need to specify here. Does not every manager know from manifold experience that, once you turn an actor loose on the stage with a good "fat" scene to play, he will never leave it till you drive or drag him off? Love scenes also, of the delicately sentimental sort, whether tinged with humor or with some richer emotional color, come easily into the list of leisurely passages; so do practically all scenes of tender feeling, such as those depicting parental affection, self-sacrifice, leave takings. In quicker time are scenes of bustle and confusion, of busy come and go of every sort, whenever the stage is full of people, when "things are happening" every instant. Scenes made up of sketchy character bits, of disconnected incidents depicting activity and

life, as in a street, at a railway station, in a ballroom, in the lobby of a hotel, are obviously meant to be played briskly. In light comedies, where the close of an act is usually a crisis laughable or humorously sentimental, it is best to quicken the pace all through the latter part of the act up to the fall of the curtain. Plays of violent action are apt to call for a rapid pace, which will be followed by strongly contrasting passages of tense emotion played very slowly. The first act of "The Great Divide" is a splendid example of this. When the situation at the close of the act is imbued with deep feeling, exclusive of sexual passion, let the pace slacken down till the movement is so slight that the slow and quiet descent of the curtain will hardly be noticed. Hurry a closing scene of this description, like that in the last act of "Cyrano de Bergerac," for instance, and you ruin it forever.

One suggests "slow" or "fast" for this or that scene; but it should be borne in mind all the time that the two terms are not meant to be contradictory but comparative. Amateurs must be kept at all hazards from hurrying and gabbling, as most of them do, thereby missing one "value" after another: they must be drilled to maintain a steadiness of pace and cadence. No scene can be rushed through. What may appear to the actors an intolerably slow pace, is often exactly calculated to win a response from the audience, will perfectly convey the sense and point of the passage across the footlights. A rate of speed must always be chosen which is slow enough for the actors to *act* the scene instead of merely *reciting* it. Remember that more than half of the purport of any scene is to be conveyed by the action and facial expression of the players. Thus to convey a meaning requires an appreciable

time. Deliberation—not dawdling, which is either a slovenly crime or a mark of weak wits—means that opportunity is given to play the scene "for all there is in it." Every movement on the stage must be expressive, suggestive, full of color and interest, made to live. This cannot be accomplished by a mere fluent reading of the lines of the play. Slow is the watchword. You can read in an hour and a half a play that will require two hours and a half really to act.

PAUSES

If you decide to play with deliberation —not to rush and huddle the action of the play, however brisk may be the general movement, you will immediately perceive that this excellent quality is secured mainly by establishing good long *pauses* between many of the speeches. It is true that there is no terror, in the opinion of

the amateur, equal to that of having to keep silent, save the kindred one of having to keep still. Unless he is speaking, he is apt to feel lost and wretched, simply because he does not know how to *act*. The seconds of his silences appear to him like minutes in their duration. Let the manager insist on proper pauses, and he will be bombarded with entreaties and threats from those members of his cast who are sure they appear perfectly silly. But he must stand his ground; he can meet all the worry of his actors by training them how best they can demean themselves in the intervals he has demanded of them. The point of allowing these good, marked intervals of silence is obvious enough. It is then that the actor has an opportunity to show by his play what is going on in the mind of the character he is representing; he can do more in the way of genuine and convincing impersonation when he is say-

ing nothing than by the longest set of speeches. The play of feeling shows when the actor is silent—in his face, in his slightest gesture and movement; it is in the silences that you feel the attention of the audience riveted to the stage and what is going on there.

The actor with ample resources of technique will long for a pause; the amateur will dread it. Of course, a mere blank in the action would be intolerable; the coach's every effort will be bent on helping the actor to fill up the pause with expressive action and by-play. And it is perfectly true that, no matter how badly they play, amateurs who make the best use they can of deliberate pauses in the course of any scene, will give a richer, and fuller, and more interesting performance, than those who merely recite fluently. They will appear to be thinking their parts. So very important is this need of expressive inter-

vals, that one is quite safe in saying that, when you coach any amateur play, spend thrice the time on teaching the cast how to play a silent passage than on drill in reading lines.

A simple and practical way of reckoning the comparative length of pauses is to count beats. If the manager reckons at the rate of one hundred counts to the minute, he will have a tried and accepted basis to go on. A little practice with his company will fix this "count" in their minds. Thus, at rehearsal, if he wishes an actor to take a little time before reading some speech, the manager will bid him to "count five" (say) before he speaks. Often the manager will make the count aloud, for the benefit of the others. Another character makes his entrance (say) after a "count of ten." And the pauses, thus mechanically established, will range in practice from "two," as high as "twenty," or even

(as often happens on the professional stage) to "thirty." Getting the general idea of the length of the pauses well in mind gives an excellent notion of the general speed at which a scene is to be taken; the perfectly mechanical counting will establish very solidly what may be called for want of a better name the *rhythm* of the scene. For no sooner does a pair of actors begin to read a scene with the silences well marked and each of the proper duration, than they begin to read their lines rapidly or slowly, almost unconsciously, in a kind of cadence derived from the length of the silences they follow or precede. This same device of a regular count, or beat, to mark the length of the pauses will be found of inestimable value in steadying a company of amateurs through any sustained passage. When every actor on the stage knows the length of time to be allowed for any interval between speeches,

he will time his own play accurately, he will not get nervous over the fear that somebody has missed a cue. Just here be it said that the prompter must be perfectly familiar with the rate of speed at which a passage is to be read; otherwise, in a panic, he will be breaking in with hoarse admonitions to the heroine when she is purposely holding back from reading some speech, and so make himself extremely unpopular.

One word of caution will not be out of place at the conclusion of any dissertation on timing or pacing a scene. There are two varieties of the genus actor, either of whom can totally upset the most carefully cadenced and flowing passage imaginable. And both must be well disciplined from the start of rehearsals. One is the dull person, with little or no ear and sense of rhythm. He it is who invariably reads his speeches a shade too slowly or too quickly, who picks up his cue haltingly. What

shall be done with him depends wholly on circumstances. Perhaps he has guaranteed the expenses of the show; perhaps he is engaged to the heroine. So you cannot always risk murdering him without risking the success of the play. But any lesser penalty, as cruel and unnatural as may be deemed appropriate, should be dealt out to that offender unsparingly. If he only knew how other members of the company will come to hate him—! The other criminal is the amateur actor who actually is talented, or believes himself so to be. Give him an inch and he will appropriate the whole stage. Once let him "find" himself in a scene which gives him any chance to display his ability, and he is sure to take all the time he wants, often badly delaying a passage, sometimes blithely ruining it. Here naught will avail but the manager's authority and tact. Sometimes he must surrender, and time the scene all

over again, to fit the "star's" selfishness. But it is far better to conquer, even at the risk of a pitched battle, and compel the "star" to play his bits in time with the rest of the action. For, seriously, the time, the place, the swing, the cadence of a scene is no small thing to trifle with; it is so difficult and delicate to establish, that only the most serious and weighty considerations should be allowed to alter it.

IN GENERAL

It is perhaps well, at the first rehearsal, to walk through whatever act of the play you elect to begin with, book in hand, for the sake of letting the actors get some idea of the story, and a general sense of what are the obviously important scenes of the play, as well as the general relations of the characters to one another. With the second rehearsal, however, begin to play the thing in minute detail. Take up first the

"big" scenes, and study these inch by inch; take next all the important entrances and exits; next every bit of special character work among minor characters; next those passages which serve merely as transitions from one scene to another. Establish the pace of each scene, mostly by determining the duration of the intervals between speeches, very early.

It is best, probably, to start rehearsing each separate scene or passage with the idea of bringing out only the more obvious and easy "values." If you try for too much at the outset you will get along too slowly, and will perhaps bore your actors. But later, if you keep in mind always the discovery of new and richer "values," and get your actors so interested in their parts that they too will seek the fullest interpretation, you will find it very profitable and enjoyable too, to read more and more into nearly every line. If the time at your dis-

posal for rehearsal is very limited, of course you can only "touch the high spots" all through the play. Compare the way in which a two-a-day stock company plays some piece with the manner of its rendering by a really high grade company, which has had long months for rehearsal, and you will note how the former fails by much to extract from the play all there is in it of dramatic fare. Amateurs, too, are often under severe limitation in the way of talent; the stage manager must judge very carefully as to what he can safely get his company to do smartly and surely. By trying for too much, he may miss all along the line. But do not, on the contrary, be content with too little—for that is the way of the amateur we want not to follow.

The stage manager must be very strict in the matter of getting his actors to rehearse without looking at their books, at the earliest possible moment. Depend-

ence on the printed text is fatal. After two weeks' rehearsing, there should be no good excuse for carrying the script in the hand. If the actor is continually glancing at his book, he cannot possibly do any acting; he will learn his lines far faster by an effort of memory than by constant reading of them.

Last of all, remember that it is the manager with the quiet voice and the smooth manner who gets the best results. He who helps and suggests is the one who wins. He who interrupts all the time, who nags, who is sarcastic, is doomed to utter failure. Be assured also that stage managing a play is frankly very exhausting work; and anybody without a good steady nerve and a good temper had best not undertake it at all. If you cannot keep cool, if you cannot retain a tone of authority without screaming and blustering, do not accept the responsibility.

V

THE AMATEUR ACTOR'S A-B-C

It is far from being the purpose of this chapter to essay the probably impossible task of reducing even the simplest aspects of the actor's art to any set of formulas or rules. Within the limits of an elementary handbook like this, allowing that there is anything one can write down about acting, enough will have been said if there appears a list of "Don'ts," predicated on the shortcomings of the average amateur, and some suggestions as to the rudimentary principles of diction and action.

THE MENTAL ATTITUDE

The skilled professional actor is endowed with or develops a kind of dual personality. When he is on the stage, one

part of him incarnates, through the imagination, the character in the play. For the time, he actually is Iago, Lear, Falstaff, Brutus, Tartufe. The real man has projected himself; he is no longer (for the moment) Booth, Irving, or Coquelin. He is a king, a knave, a braggart, a hero. But at the very same time, the actor is—never so consciously or keenly—himself. He is so acutely self conscious that he watches his other half perform; and conversely, his imaginative side never acts so effectively as when his real self is alert to direct, correct, guide. One may dismiss as romance the old belief that a great actor is ever "lost in the part." His performance, a work of the imagination, plus talent for mimicry, is moving and sincere and compelling only because his critical faculties are at work every minute to keep him going—to give form and substance to what his fancy has conceived.

But whereas these two sets of faculties are, in the case of the great actor, exquisitely balanced, and work in perfect harmony to achieve a fine result, there is a large class of amateurs who, with the same dual equipment, are quite helpless. The balance is not there; the training is wanting to one side or the other. Either the beginner is unable to imagine the characteristics of the part he may be called to assume, through lack of that peculiar faculty we call sympathy and quick apprehension; or he is, as it were, dumb, incapable of expressing what he feels and knows will delineate the character. For the latter class there is hope in plenty; all he lacks is good technical equipment. But beware of the would-be actor who cannot conceive, cannot imagine the outlines and general look of a character all by himself. He is hopeless. He it is who is the "stick."

In other words, and this probably lies at the bottom of all good acting, the player must *feel* his part. He must, for the time being, enter into, share, make his own, the feelings, passions, mental workings of the character he wishes to play; he is to "sense" the character. This is nothing that can be taught; it is an endowment; one possesses it, or one is utterly without it. There are fairly competent actors who have only a small share of this faculty, it is true; it is the fashion to let them appear at high salaries; but how many of them there are who, in every part they assume, retain ever a flavor, a hint, a suggestion, of their own personality! How few there are who are able really to sink themselves, really to impersonate! But at least let there be an earnest effort to appreciate the part; let the actor ask himself continually what the character is thinking, what he is feeling; let him en-

deavor, for the moment, to make those thoughts and feelings his own. A sympathetic realization of the character's content—that is what we are after.

Earnestly sought and assiduously practiced, this habit or gift of "sensing" characters will tend strongly to produce in the actor the absolutely essential quality of acting all the time he is on the stage. It must never be forgotten that the instant he drops out of his part, even mentally, he is as good as out of the play. His part in the composition of the stage picture, his contribution to the action of the scene, must be sustained with perfect faithfulness and unflagging devotion. However unimportant, the character he plays has a certain value whenever he appears; and this value must be given in full measure. In action, let him try his best to get every possible ounce of interest and worth out of every line and movement; let him do to

the full what he believes the character would do under the circumstances. In repose, the same holds good. If he feels the amateur's usual discomfort, when he is not doing or saying something, and feels himself merely in the way, let him keep right on, acting harder than ever. That will cure his nervousness. Outwardly, this attitude of mind, in repose, will show itself by intelligent attention, perhaps, if the actor is listening or watching. He will really and truly listen to what the other actor is saying; he will support the other by letting the effect of the other's words show in his face and bearing. He will show his attention also, by not letting his eyes wander.

THE ACTOR'S EYES

This matter of the actor's eyes is very important. It ought to be brought to the amateur's attention early. He must

learn and appreciate the great truth and principle that whether he is in the center of the stage or a humble super in the Roman mob, he is to use his eyes with the very greatest care. Remember that the eye is the most expressive feature. Without the slightest aid of speech or gesture, the movement of the eyes—lowering, closing, raising, dilating—may be made to convey the most varying emotions with tremendous vividness. It must be drilled and drummed into the beginner on the stage that any uncertainty of regard, any shifting of the eyes aimlessly, will absolutely kill any speech the character may be delivering. Let the eyes wander, and straightway it looks to the audience as if the actor's mind was wandering. A steady regard means concentration. A regard deliberately shifted signifies, with vivid clearness, a change of mind or feeling. Watch the eyes of any

good actor; note how steady they are. He speaks more pointedly and eloquently with his eyes than with his lips.

This counsel, that the actor shall act every minute—that he shall have in mind, without interruption or intermission, the one great task of impersonation, the assumption of the character's feelings and traits—lies at the foundation of all rules set for his guidance. Till he can give a sense of vitality and reality to the character by the use of his imagination, there is not much gained by drilling him in how to move and speak. Train the actor to observe types of character, and to watch their external manifestations; train him to imitate these as faithfully as possible—to mimic. This is the point of departure. What comes later is not much more than acquired skill in presenting his impersonation in public effectively.

MOVEMENT

A few hints as to the proper control and use of one's members on the stage, a word or two on how the voice may best be employed,—externals, but things necessary to learn if one wishes to appear with a fair degree of ease and grace,—will not be amiss, in any chapter intended for beginners, though it is desired, above all, to impress on the amateur the great necessity of conscientious effort at impersonation.

In another place will be found a discussion of the broad principles which govern general movement on the stage, intended for the stage manager who watches the rehearsal from "out in front." We saw there all general movement on the stage is governed entirely by the necessities of the action, and proceeds from one grouping arranged for one special moment of time, to another, arranged for a

succeeding moment. A similar principle, it is believed, should strictly govern the movement of each separate actor.

It must not be forgotten that every least movement of the actor's body or limbs or head or eyes (and this applies to the least important character) has a double effect: (1) it has an important bearing on the composition of the stage picture; (2) it is always taken by the audience as having a meaning connected with the plot of the play, as revealing character, or as emphasizing some special emotional or picturesque effect. This is true because every action and movement of every actor is vividly apparent in the brilliant light of the stage—nothing goes unseen; and it is also true, because the audience assumes (and must be let to) that the people on the stage are really people in the play and nobody else. So each slightest gesture, change of position, or change

of pose, must be carefully thought out. The aimless movement confuses—worse than that, it dims the general effect of the scene. And this is quite as true for the individual as it is for the whole company. Here, as there, good counsel would advise *no movement without a meaning.*

Conversely, *unless the actor has some definite purpose in moving, he is to remain absolutely still.* This is extremely difficult to teach to amateurs; but it is an ideal which should be diligently striven for. Repose is vitally important, because here, as elsewhere, any movement must be made significant. Good actors move about the stage very little. Even in a bustling, lively farce, there is less running here and there than appears. Good actors are very sparing of their gestures. And so, when they *do* cross the stage, stand up, sit, stiffen, relax, turn, advance, draw back a step,—do anything, in short, their move-

ment arrests attention instantly. If contrasted sharply with a prevailing repose and repression, the turn of a head, a suddenly clenched fist or leveled finger, a dawning smile, the closing of the eyes, will tell a whole story, will reveal a thought or a feeling with absolutely unerring accuracy and the greatest vividness.

It should be obvious, however, that the actor must work very hard to choose, in every case, a gesture or an expression which will be unmistakable in its meaning. It must be decisive, illustrative, vivid. It can admit of no doubtful interpretation. Here the amateur will need lots of study and care. What gesture, what expression, does most vividly convey the feeling in question? It is the problem which the actors in the moving picture plays have to deal with, and solve also; it is what all good players of pantomime understand thoroughly. It may be helpful to many

amateurs who are in doubt as to what gestures, what alteration of the features, best convey a certain meaning, to learn all they can from the play of the "movies" actor.

Once an actor's personal play in any single moment is decided on and adopted, there should be the greatest hesitation in changing it in any way. Once rehearsed and found satisfactory, it becomes almost immediately a part of the fabric of the play. Other actors will look for it; its duration will become a very important consideration in the timing of the whole scene.

Speech follows action, on the stage. Contrary to the practice of the orator, who uses his gestures merely to enforce his words, the actor should proceed on the principle that his lines merely amplify and illuminate the suggestion clearly conveyed by his play. Thus, in practice, if movement or gesture is desired with any speech,

let it precede the spoken word by a very little.

Amateur actors commonly believe that the attention of the audience is riveted to their hands. To dispose of those most uncomfortable members appears a very great problem. But the truth is, that it is vastly more important, from every point of view, that the actor shall have a care about his feet. The way an actor *stands* is what people in the audience really notice. And a word of caution may be desirable here, since we are talking about very elementary matters. Everything requires that, when the actor is standing still, he must stand absolutely still. Just as his eyes must not stray vaguely, so his bootsoles must be screwed to the floor, when he is not moving. He may retain any pose for only a few seconds, but once placed, he is to stay planted.

If the actor is standing obliqued to the

audience, the upstage foot is that which is to be advanced.

On entering from either side, let the upstage foot take the first step in.

Kneel on the downstage knee; if you drop on both knees, let the upstage knee sink to the floor the last.

A general caution also as to the distribution of the weight would advise that at all times, when he is in repose, the actor shall be in such physical balance that he can leave his position and assume another gracefully, and without any effect of shuffling or indecision. He must take off cleanly, as a runner would put it. The good actor has a kind of crispness and alertness in his bearing, an easy and flexible balance; he moves with precision.

GESTURES

As to gestures, what can be said? Only this, perhaps, in this chapter: Avoid, un-

less you are deliberately trying for an effect of awkwardness and angularity, any gestures with the arm held and moved stiffly. The sweeping, circular gesture is still the most picturesque and the most sightly. Maybe an illustration will help explain this principle. Suppose you desire to pick up a letter lying on a table at your right, and then hand it to a person standing on your left. Many amateurs will instinctively pick the letter up in the right hand, retain it, and extend the same hand to the other person half turning the body to do so. This is wrong, technically, from a good many standpoints. The movement is awkward in itself; it tends to hide your face from the audience at a moment when interest is awake; it causes you to gesture with your downstage hand and arm. A far better way would be to pick up the letter with the right hand; change it to the left; and then ex-

tend the left hand to your fellow actor, the movements of either hand to be such that each describes the arc of an ellipse. Always point, gesticulate, beckon, and the like, with the upstage hand and arm.

THE STAGE EMBRACE

Finally, what chapter of this sort would be complete without a reference to that moment trying yet thrilling, for amateurs, which is enlivened by the "stage embrace"? Awkwardly taken, it leads only to embarrassment and rage on the part of the actors, to shrill merriment on the part of the audience; but smoothly and easily engineered, it brings the curtain down triumphantly. Briefly then, if the hero and the heroine—as in who shall say how many hundred plays?—are standing center, with their profiles turned to the audience, let the man slip his downstage arm under the

girl's, while her downstage arm encircles his shoulder. The man's upstage arm, on the side away from the audience, is placed outside the girl's. But it is with the upstage arm that he draws her to him.

Only a very few matters are taken up here; it must be clearly understood that we have attempted to discuss only the most rudimentary principles of stage deportment. But if the amateur will try to act all the time, stand still except when the action of the play requires him to move, keep his balance, and be consistent in whatever "business" he undertakes, he will have at least made a start.

THE VOICE

A few fundamentals of proper reading are very necessary for the amateur to learn; and these are quite within his reach. They may be insisted on by the stage manager fairly.

The actor must enunciate clearly; by which is meant that every word and syllable shall be well shaped and spoken so as to be heard distinctly. Skillful reading, which gives the true value to every slightest inflection, is probably out of the reach of the average amateur; he is too badly handicapped, generally speaking, by native habits of slovenly speech. But the cruder sins of faulty elocution, such as the blurring of consonants and queer perversions of vowel sounds, should not be tolerated even in the least pretentious company. The latter crime consists in giving to all the vowels a sound most like that expressed by a short "u." Thus, "Amurrican," "Yurrup," "Englund," "Unly," "Urgunt," "umung," "goun' " (by which such innocent and worthy words as American, Europe, England, only, urgent, among, and going, are intended), are on the lips of all slovens; and, while such

vocables are bad enough in daily speech, they become, on the stage perfectly intolerable. They give any actor a stamp of commonness instantly. Worse, their use makes it hard for the actor to make himself understood. Similarly, we must insist on a crisp and resonant pronunciation of the final consonants. It may be that any special care bestowed on -nd, -st, -ng, and their fellows, above all when the next word begins with a consonant, will appear to the actor extremely affected, and will have the effect of slowing up his facility and ease of speaking. But this is not the case, in reality. Keep at it, till any temporary inconvenience is overcome, for the gain is simply immense. An actor should not be slovenly and lax in his manner of speech, any more than he should lounge and slump in his bearing. Care in these two regards will do away with the danger, probably, which results

from running words together by the elision of last or first syllables.

Effective enunciation is also, very largely, a matter of proper breath support, and of the formation of the sound by the proper vocal organs. Unfortunately, it is probably the case that not one amateur actor in a hundred will have any opportunity for instruction and drill in these branches of voice culture; certainly the duty of the stage manager for any given production can hardly extend so far. But the actor should realize, and the manager must show, that, while the stage does not demand loud speech, it does require a solid resonance of tone. Let the amateur practice assiduously the trick of deep breathing and of slight expenditure of breath for any sound. Let him shape each vocable very carefully as he pronounces it, even though, at first, he seems to himself to be exaggerating absurdly.

One often hears it laid down as a rule that the actor's voice must be directed toward the audience. An inheritance from the old, declamatory stage; a convention established when the construction of the stage demanded that it be observed; this *obiter dictum* of the older generation of managers is to-day not so universally obeyed. Probably amateurs are too strictly bound by it. To direct the voice outward, all the time, is very apt to give the effect of stepping out of the scene, of unreality, of declamation. It is best, probably, that the actor shall consider first the sense and the necessities of the scene he is playing—addressing the other actors rather than the audience. For, by dextrous arrangement of the people on the stage, it is nearly always possible to combine an effect of natural interchange of speeches with the necessity of making the audience hear every word. There is per-

haps one exception to this general, loosely interpreted rule. Every speech which explains some point vital to an understanding of the plot of the play should be read in such a way that, even at the slight risk of unnatural attitude and intonation, the whole of it is given straight to the spectators. But, in general, it is probably better to have the actors speak from such positions as they naturally assume in the course of the play's action. This will have one excellent effect, at all events; it will very neatly checkmate the actor who is not happy unless he is playing straight to the audience, for the sake of catching the attention and applause at all costs.

Since this special kind of sinner is usually found among those actors who play broad character parts, with good opportunities for fun-making or tear-winning, this paragraph is written mainly for their benefit. Playing a character part, if there

is any dialect to it, or any very marked physical trait, becomes a pitfall indeed, and a straight road to utter failure, unless the actor in the part sustains the oddity of speech and bearing consistently. This is no easy task,—how many times has this comment been made already in these pages?—but it simply must be carried out. The character actor cannot "let down" an instant.

For that matter, neither can any actor, playing any part. It will doubtless be found that, for many amateurs, the increased resonance of tone demanded, together with the effort to enunciate clearly, will tend to make the actor's voice take on a tone and quality a little different from that of his ordinary speaking voice; naturally enough, also, almost any part will color one's natural voice a little, in itself. So, if this does happen, let the actor be quite sure that he is going to sustain his

new voice all through the play. To lose it, and to revert to his everyday manner of speaking, will give the effect of the actor's stepping clean out of the character he is impersonating.

TEAM WORK

A good deal has been made, all through these chapters, of the point that the successful performance of any play depends very largely on the completeness with which all the parts are made to move together toward a common end. For one of the players to fail to do his share purposely, from bad temper or mere shiftlessness, is certainly no less a crime than for a performer in an orchestra to play out of tune and time. Not speaking of the stupidity and selfishness of being lazy or sulky, inattentive or officious, it is enough to call the actor's attention to the fact that, if he does not play his part just as well as

he can, if he does not conform scrupulously and willingly to the limits imposed on him, he will go far toward ruining the production. It is no exaggeration to say that in any well balanced performance, every actor depends absolutely on his fellows; with one part awry, the whole crumbles. Suppose you do dislike the leading lady; what if she is pretentious; suppose it is true that she got her part only through personal "pull" with the management? Never mind. Support her in all the scenes you play with her, as if her success was your dearest wish on earth. You can easily ruin her part; you can make her appear foolish; you can make her extremely unhappy, merely by forgetting or maiming your own lines so that she has no cues to follow; you can be listless when you should be animated; you can fail to "play up" in any of a thousand ways, and so work all manner of satisfactory revenges

on her for any sort of grievance. And this is sweet. But at the same time, sir, you are utterly spoiling the play, and that is pretty hard on the other people playing with you. The same result, ruin, is achieved most successfully, when you take more time than is right for your pet bits of action, when you deliberately play for applause, when you lounge through a part you do not fancy, when you cut or alter, without consulting anybody, some speech that may not please you. All this demoralizes a cast completely. Not knowing what you are going to do next, they will get uncertain of their own lines and parts, and the play will go straight to pieces.

No, no, team work is the thing. Perhaps that is where the alleged educational value of amateur theatricals comes in. Subordination, concession, enthusiasm for small opportunities, modesty on being assigned responsibilities, eagerness to work

for a single ideal which is not selfish but common—surely all these qualities are called for and developed in any group of amateurs, if they undertake even the simplest play of all. If one cannot work for the common good, if one cannot obey orders without question, one were better off the stage altogether. One hears the taunt that the only excuse for "private theatricals" is the vanity of the actors, who wish to parade themselves before the eyes of their indulgent friends, and get applauded for their supposed cleverness. Try to make sure that in your case, at least, this is not justified. Try working to make the "show" just as successful as you possibly can. It is a lot more satisfactory.

VI

MAKE-UP

How many amateurs take pains with their make-ups? Not but what the majority are persuaded that some measure of paint and powder is necessary, if only for the reason that "professionals always do," or for the other reason that the roses and lilies of the toilet table are thought reliable friends when nature has been niggardly. But while it is easy enough, even in Puritan communities, to get the girls to use a dab of rouge and a flick of the eyebrow pencil, while the men—much vainer! —are usually amused by sticking on false whiskers or cramming on ill fitting wigs, it is often very difficult to get a company of

amateurs to take their make-ups seriously. They have trouble in understanding that their make-ups will either contribute a great deal to the general artistic value of the play, or will go far toward spoiling it altogether. We all recall those traditional last minute scrambles, when one or two perspiring and desperate volunteers try to make up a whole line of excited, nervous actors,—when spirit gum refuses to stick, when the hard worked rouge pot gives out, when, after all, it is perfectly and discouragingly obvious that the Old Man of the play, in spite of his gray wig and weird whiskers, is not a day over twenty-five, when—but why retail more of a familiar and harrowing experience?

But it should not be difficult to avoid at least the more obvious mistakes and difficulties. Let us see if we cannot find some general principles and simple directions, which will help a little to get good results.

For it is to be understood—is it not?—that making up has to be taken rather seriously, after all.

At the bottom of the matter lie three considerations.

In the first place, *the actor appears at a distance from the spectators.* In a theater seating a thousand persons, or more, the actor is anywhere from fifteen to fifty feet away from his audience. Removed in this way, he is to remember that his features look insignificant and indistinct. Professional actors and actresses, in most cases, have well marked, rather accentuated features—the arch of the eye socket, the spring of the nose, the modeling of the chin, and the lines around the mouth, are, in the case of practically every man or woman whom nature has suited for the stage physically, remarkable for their boldness and purity. "The actor's face" is a perfectly recognized type. But while

the play of such strongly marked features may be observable enough even at a distance, helped as it is by trained muscles, there is not a professional living, however well endowed in this particular, who does not accentuate by every means in the power of his make-up box, those traits he may possess. How much more careful then must the amateur be, with his (usually) more softly modeled features, to build and color till his smile and scowl are perfectly apparent to the backmost rows in the house? Here again we have to note the inevitable slight exaggeration of nature necessitated by stage conditions.

Furthermore, not only does the actor s distance from the audience affect the matter of make-up, but also the fact that he plays in a direct glare of artificial light, of a character and intensity very different from that of nature,—a light by which his natural complexion appears pale and

pasty, his features smaller than natural, and his eyes sunken.

It is also to be noted that the lighting system obtaining generally in the theaters (though a tendency is at work to change this) brings about an illumination which frequently completely reverses the effect of natural lighting—bringing shadows, that is, where lights exist by day. The portions of the face naturally shaded, such as the space between the eye and the brow, the underpart of the nose, below the chin and jaw, below the under lip, are brought by the footlights into brilliant relief, while the forehead, bridge of the nose, cheek-bones, upper lip and chin, usually the best lighted parts of the face, tend on the stage to become shadowed. The footlights, that is, illuminate from below; and the illumination of the footlights is that which mainly controls and underlies the whole stage system of lighting. Only the intel-

ligent use of paint can remedy this palpably absurd condition.

As has been said, perhaps the commonest fault of amateurs in this regard is to use too little make-up. It is too often assumed that, for young people, all that is needed is a dab of rouge, a line of black on the eyebrows, a little powder, and a touch of scarlet on the lips. It is piously believed by the inexperienced that, given a gray or white wig, three perpendicular lines between the eyebrows, three more at the outer corners of the eyes, two more from the wings of the nose to the corners of the mouth, and one across the forehead, will give a perfect illusion of old age. The frightful and unearthly visages contrived for character and comic parts by the amateur make-up-man need no comment at all; one merely shudders recalling them. What happens when people made up in this sketchy fashion face the audi-

ence? However pink and white and pretty the girls look at close range, in the glare of the stage light their faces become merely red and white masks; their eyes lose all brilliancy, all definition of outline, retire, become mere black dots; their noses become startlingly *retroussé;* the whole facial contour becomes disturbingly unnatural. In the case of those impersonating old people, such hasty tracings as we mention above give no illusion of wrinkles; they are plainly streaks of paint. Too little make-up is almost worse than none at all. Its only use is to tickle the audience.

It will be asked immediately: What requirements, then, shall we call really obligatory in this matter of make-up?

The minimum necessities, both of materials and of labor, to make actors look human, and in character, under a strange, fierce light, are those detailed herewith. And it should be believed that even the

simplest amateur play, if it is proposed to make it at all worth while, will need every one of these apparently fussy aids to a good performance. Amateur actors and managers simply must realize the fact that good and complete make-ups cannot be improvised, executed hurriedly, or neglected in any least detail.

It is best, of course, for every actor to have his own make-up box; a slight expenditure will buy enough grease paint and other necessities for many a play, and the stuff will not deteriorate when stored. But if this is impracticable, every member of the cast must have access to the following supplies:

Cold cream
Cocoa butter
Grease paint, blonde flesh
" " brunette flesh
" " yellowish flesh

Grease paint, sunburn
" " ochre
" " white
" " gray
" " blue
" " carmine
" " crimson
Lining pencil
Crape hair
Spirit gum
Powder (white, pink, brunette)
Rouge
Cheesecloth
Powder puff

With these articles spread out before him conveniently, the amateur should begin his task, seated if possible (for the work will take a little time), before a mirror which is brilliantly lighted. If possible, these make-up mirrors should have the electric light bulbs set in the frames;

and amber bulbs should be mingled with the white ones in the proportion of about one in three. If all this rigging is impracticable, at least be quite sure that the mirror gets a glare of light from some source direct. It is a good plan for women to cover their hair with a cap of some sort when they make up; it is easier to dress the hair after the face work is finished.

Rub the face and throat thoroughly and lightly with cold cream, which will make the subsequent application of the grease paint easier. Wipe off any excess with soft cheesecloth, so the face will not appear shiny; and it is sometimes well, at this point, to apply very lightly a little flesh colored powder.

BODY COLOR

Then apply the grease paint. There is a very wide selection possible here, as the

paint is made in colors suitable for every kind of "body color" or basic complexion tint, from the pale pink-and-pearl of the young blonde to the ochreish ivory of old age; from the ruddy tan of the outdoor man to the pasty white of the invalid. Choose very carefully, for this application will be the prevailing color of the skin. Lay the paint on in wide streaks, heating the stick a little, if necessary, to make the paint flow easily and quickly; then with the tips of the fingers gently spread and blend, till the face, ears, eyelids, and neck are completely coated. The space below and behind the ears is often neglected, also the upper eyelid; so have good care in this regard. The grease paint on, dust the face over again with some powder.

ROUGE

Next comes whatever red you wish to apply. It will be seen that any of the

grease paints, even the ruddiest, tend strongly to make the skin look yellowish, and this, for some complexions, must of course be in a measure neutralized. Let it be remembered also that, in nature, the forehead always appears lightest in color and more yellow, than any other part of the face; that the lighter reds appear on the sides of the nose, just below the cheek bones, and on the cheeks above the line from the nose to the corner of the mouth; that the heavier tones appear lower on the face—on the jaws and around the chin. Just under the eyes, the skin has often a very transparent, pale purplish tone; the ears (in health) are usually redder than other parts of the face. In general, go carefully in the matter of rouge; it is easy to use too much and so make the face look patchy. Use just enough to brighten up the prevailing sallow hue of the grease paint; and apply it so that it blends into

the rest of the face color imperceptibly. Be very careful about using any red near the eyes. This is a very common amateur fault. The rouge is applied too high on the face. The effect of this is to make the eyes look very small; and it gives a curiously distorted, pinched look, hard to define, yet painful to look at. Lay the rouge mostly on the lower part of the cheeks. An old and fairly reliable guide in the matter is to grin as wide as you can, at the same time puckering up your eyes, which will bring your cheeks up into high relief. Use no rouge higher than the top of the exaggerated curve of the cheeks thus emphasized. The heavier red of a man's complexion will have to be rendered by more grease paint, rather than with rouge, which is too delicate and transparent a material, except for women and young people. And say to yourself again and again, every time you touch the rouge

box—"Most amateurs use entirely too much of this."

THE LIPS

Next make up the lips. If you wish to retain the natural shape of the mouth, simply cover the lips to their outer edges with carmine, with a touch of crimson on the upper lip. If you wish to improve on nature, draw the line of the lips as the heart and taste dictate, remembering only to make the upper lip fuller in the middle than in the corners and to color it a little darker. A tiny triangle of carmine placed just at the corners of the mouth and above them will make a mouth look ready to smile; to make a mouth droop at the corners, or to give the effect of enlarging it, continue the natural downward curve of the lips with a little carmine, blue, or brown. A pouting expression will be helped by a touch of blue or gray just in

the middle under the lower lip, to give the effect of a shadow.

THE EYES

The eyes will take more time than all the rest put together. Remember all that has been said as to their importance; that they are the most expressive feature. This implies that they shall be given good definition—they must be framed, as it were; their natural shape must be a little accentuated; for special purposes, the shape must be a wee bit distorted by the deft way in which lines are drawn about them. Be it said that one need have no fear of injuring the eyes in any way by the proper use of grease paint and lining pencils. The girls who drop a little belladonna in, to make their eyes more brilliant, are of course taking chances; but the average amateur can use all the paint and pains in the world around his lids and lashes,

and suffer nothing but a lot of work getting it all clean again. Probably the first task in connection with the proper make-up of the eyes is to increase their apparent size. This is best done by carefully blackening the upper lashes (not the edge of the lids, be it understood); then by continuing a little the natural outward slope of the upper lid with a lining pencil, very lightly handled; then by shadowing (with gray or blue) the outer and inner curves of the lower lid, very delicately, with a faint trace of black on the line of the lower lashes. Place a small but very vivid touch of brilliant carmine at the inner corner of the eye. At the highest part of the curve of the upper lid, just under the arch of the eye socket, do a little more shading with blue or gray—the point of this being to neutralize the effect of the footlights which, oddly enough bring this naturally shadowed part of the face into

the highest relief. Treat the eyebrows as the character requires—delicately arched, fiercely contracted, eliminated altogether. It will give an oddly humorous cast to a face, oftentimes, if the outer ends of the eyebrows are slightly elevated; a prevailing anxious look is helped by elevating the inner ends of the brows. It is well to have in mind the old drawing school dictum that the shape of the eye socket is, on last analysis, a triangle. Shifting the apex of this triangle a trifle to one side or the other will result oftentimes in the most extraordinary changes in the whole cast of the countenance. It is perhaps unnecessary to caution the amateur about getting these lines about the eye as close to it as is humanly possible. And, once more, take plenty of time. The make-up of the eyes is perhaps the most important and difficult of all,—whether you wish them luminous

and large, or mere slits (for which do none of the things recommended above), or to represent illness and fatigue (for which use a bit of gray or blue to accentuate the line of the natural hollow below the eye), or to help out the general effect you wish any special character to give. Remember that the light you appear in is very bright, that any slips or imperfections will be remorselessly shown up; that the eyes will give immediately the first suggestion about the character, on that character's first entrance.

THE NOSE

To alter the natural shape of the nose, use the putty which comes for the purpose. This can be molded to any shape between the fingers, and is to be applied before the grease paint is put on. A bold line of white down the bridge of the nose will make the nose look straighter and longer.

LINES AND WRINKLES

Any actor playing the part of a very old person ought to study very carefully, from life or from photographs or other representations, just where the wrinkles and lines of age run, and what is their general shape. Remember that it is the look of the throat which perhaps best betrays age—the prominence of the heavy cords and muscles there; and the knotted, bony hands of the veteran must also be carefully indicated. Gray or blue, very carefully applied, should be used to simulate the hollows of the temples and the cheeks; and take great care that these hollows are in right place anatomically. In drawing all wrinkles or other lines, remember that if you play in a pinkish or amber light, the tracings will appear especially deep, while a white or blue light will tend to soften them. In any event, use

brown or blue for these lines, never black.

When the make-up is finished, it may be found necessary to dust on a little more flesh colored powder, if the face looks at all shiny.

AS TO WIGS

If it is necessary to use a wig, take great pains that the line of junction across the forehead is entirely obliterated, which can usually be helped by carrying the base color over the edge of the wig. Take great pains that it fits snugly around the back of the head and over the ears; and dress it very carefully to lie smooth and tight. The wigs one gets from most costumers are shockingly ragged and long haired; they make the best looking hero appear merely comic. One cannot take too much pains in selecting wigs that shall fulfill the double duty of suggesting the character and fitting the actor snugly.

VII

THE STAGE AND THE SCENERY

THE disadvantages under which most companies of amateurs give their performances are so many and so formidable, that one often wonders how they attain the success they often do attain. Improvised stages, ill designed and ill fitted costumes, inappropriate scenery, very bad lighting —against all these obstacles the amateur contends blithefully. Most frequently he simply ignores the obstacles; and perhaps this is a mercy, for if he realized his handicaps, he might not run at all. But the better way, one may venture to think, is frankly to recognize the difficulties of a mechanical sort in the way of the manager; to learn what are some of the really indis-

pensable requirements in the matter of scenic investiture; and to try very hard, for the sake of the play, to live up to them.

THE DIMENSIONS OF THE STAGE

Most amateur plays are produced on far too small stages. Perhaps the old fashion of "private theatricals" in somebody's drawing room is responsible for the continuance of the habit of staging even pretentious plays, oftentimes, under conditions of space which are really impossible. There may be a dozen reasons for this convention; but there are a hundred better reasons for breaking with it at every opportunity. Schools which take their dramatics at all seriously ought to use the greatest care, in building new auditoriums with a stage, that the latter is something more than a platform suitable for a concert or an address. Unless plays are to be only semi-successful as artistic produc-

tions, *the actors must have plenty of room.* On the small stages, too often deemed appropriate for non-professional players, there is quite lacking all opportunity for the free and slightly exaggerated movement so necessary for pictorial action, for using the wider range of the voice, for handsome grouping, for the proper isolation of certain actors or bits of action.

With no wish to be too exacting, one may ask that the stage shall measure not less than twenty-five feet across the proscenium arch; not less than fifteen feet from the line of the drop curtain to the scenery closing in the stage at the rear (and for exterior scenes a depth of twenty-five feet is very desirable); while in height, from the floor to the flies, the stage should measure fourteen feet, at least. It should be understood that these dimensions are actually considerably less than obtain on professional stages of

average size; and, if it is objected that the amateur "feels lost" on any but a small stage, the answer is to train him to feel at home on a good one. Perhaps it will be quite impossible to get these minimum dimensions for some stage selected, or imposed, for an amateur play. With the best hopes and intentions in the world, the company may find itself constrained to a small space. In that case, try very hard to contrive as much depth and height as possible. Depth will give an opportunity for free movement, will obviate the necessity of having all movement on the stage practically a series of crossings from one side to the other; and, in the case of any exterior scene, will make it possible, through proper lighting, to give a certain illusion of distance and atmosphere which is out of the question on a shallow stage. Height gives a sense of space and airiness; height frames the pic-

ture at the top with a good clearance, and in good proportion above the heads of the people in the composition.

THE SCENERY

The stage of fairly small size does, however, offer one sole attraction to those wise enough to take advantage of it. Almost inevitably a cramped space will impose on the manager and others responsible for scenery and accessories the practical necessity of *setting the scene simply.*

Simplicity! If every amateur stage manager would let that quality dominate and pervade every detail of his scenic investiture, what a lot would be gained! For it is unquestionably true that the use of simple scenery—the pursuit of the modern ideal of the best minds in the theater—accomplishes much for the education in taste of those who build it, and of those who look at it from the audience.

It is extremely difficult to "make come right"; there is required to decide its color, texture, and lighting, a sound artistic perception; much of the theory and history of decorative design has to be learned before a stage setting can be made exactly appropriate to the period, place, and character of the play for which it is constructed. Modern scenery is called "simple" only because it departs rather radically from the fussily elaborate and often horribly designed scenery of other (and present days).

The ideal of the scene painter and builder of the new school is, in a word, that stage scenery shall not try to be exactly *representative,* but vitally *suggestive.* It is believed that scenery and settings have accomplished their proper purposes when (1) they furnish a suitable and beautiful and harmonious background of color, and (2) they suggest unerringly, but with no

superfluity of detail, the character of the surroundings in which the action of the play transpires. Until very recently artists and carpenters have followed that line of endeavor which aims to make scenery and accessories as true to life as possible; they have faithfully tried to create an illusion of actual, physical life. Every ingenious device of lighting, all the trained skill, all the talent of artists, historical students, and craftsmen, have been employed to make a stage setting look real. And though much has been accomplished which is both beautiful and wonderful, the fact remains that these artists have never quite fulfilled their aims. Save as they have pictured certain interiors and made them look solid and substantial, they have produced effects, when the very best has been done, which are far indeed from depicting even an approach to reality. Of illusion there is very little; most often it is

absent altogether. The counterfeit of wall or tree or distant landscape, so long supplied by painted surfaces of lath and canvas seems, after all, a vain thing, rather childish, a convention which one wonders has been so long accepted. An awakened and steadily broadening sense of truth and fitness in the art of the theater, a feeling that a different set of conventions will bring setting and action into truer relations, have made possible abroad the experiments of Craig, Bakst, Reinhardt, Barker, and the other prophets of the new gospel.

A little has been tried here in America. Presently we shall have much more of the new scenery—in those centers and on those stages where taste dominates, and novelty and truth are thought worth endeavoring after. We shall have sets of scenery which are stripped of all frippery and pseudo-reality, which are reduced to

the task of supplying a beautiful color setting—gorgeous and fantastic, sober and cool, as the character of the play and the scene may demand. Instead of a throng of objects on the stage, in the way of furniture and furnishings, which were formerly placed there laboriously with the idea that such things made the scene look life-like (even though the walls waved in the draughts), we shall have very few properties, and these all perfectly designed to suggest by their shape and color the place and the time and the nature of the play, as well as possessing an intrinsic interest of their own.

Applying theory to practice, one will ask what can be done, by the hard pressed amateur, with the battered and frayed sets of stock scenery, of garish color and atrocious design, which are now dragged forth to set the interior scenes alleged to represent a drawing room, cottage,

boudoir, office or castle? If it is agreed that we are to be discontented with the scenery and settings usually supplied amateur productions, because these are usually exceedingly ugly, because they create no illusion, because they often jar badly with the general spirit and content of the play, how can we proceed to adapt them? Lacking a designer of original scenery, lacking the means of building it, can we make anything at all out of the material at hand?

Well, let us see. Certainly, any response on the part of the amateur to the call of the newer teachers in matters theatrical is something to be encouraged in every way.

INTERIORS

Let us consider what can be done with interior settings, since these form by far the largest part of the scenes played by

amateurs. Not hurrying too fast, let us suppose that for a while to come, amateurs will be constrained more or less to follow established custom, and try for the look of reality, for representation. The very fact that they have to use the frames and "flats" and "borders" already in stock will keep most companies from trying Gordon Craig or Bakst effects. And so, granting this, it should be said that interiors may be helped greatly to taking on the look of reality by careful attention to the building of the doors and windows. Probably the illusion of solid construction is destroyed most often, in interiors, by the obvious flimsiness of the lath-and-canvas doors and the painted door frames. Now at very small expense, you can have a light wooden frame built into each doorway opening, in which a genuine wooden door can be hung, with all its gear of hinges, knob, latch, and lock complete,—a door that can be

slammed noisily, a door which opens properly. Any house-wrecking firm or dealer in second-hand building materials can supply such doors; indeed, nearly every household has an old one collecting dust in attic or cellar. And the slight expense involved in having it painted, fitted, and hung, is more than justified by the real value such a fixture has for all who desire their stage settings to be decently adequate. In the matter of windows, it is well to have weighted sashes, properly arranged to open and shut, and hung in a good solid frame. The frames, in both cases, will steady the whole wall of scenery, and help to prevent its flapping and shaking. Whenever possible, be sure to use a solid ceiling instead of the rows of drop borders commonly substituted. This will not only "look better," but will act as a kind of sounding board for the voices of the actors. It is hardly necessary, in this

day, to insist that room walls shall be made of "flats" of scenery joined at the edges, and built all round the stage so as to box it in completely. All interiors to-day are so constructed; the old-fashioned "wings" are rarely seen. For the sake of breaking the monotony of straight walls along the sides, it is well to cut off the upper corners where they meet the rear wall diagonally, if possible. This will contract the stage a little, but is worth trying, if only for the sake of using up two useless bits of space. Similarly, it is not a bad idea to build a little projection in the side walls about half way back, the rear part of the room represented being thus a little narrower than that part down in front. But neither of these devices is to be employed unless permitted by the proper architectural construction of such a room as is being represented. Remember, in setting your stage, that the passage from the scene to the

space behind the scenery which leads off just behind the drop curtain and in front of the sides, is never available as an exit. Remember that every door and window must be appropriately "backed," with some scenery which will carry out the idea of another room, a terrace, a view, or of the naturally adjacent space whatever it is. Attention is necessary here, to judge from the stage setting of many amateur plays. Doors should be a little larger than the stock sizes put in dwelling houses generally, both in height and width, whenever possible.

As to the treatment of the walls, it is possible that nothing need be done at all. With access to a good theatrical storehouse, and plenty of money to pay charges, you may be able to rent scenery which has been painted by somebody with taste and skill, and therefore sufficient. But if you have to use the scenery already on hand in

the town hall, the local "opera house," or the school, as is the case with most amateurs, some radical treatment will have to be devised to make it even tolerable. Probably it is best to cover all its ugliness and dinginess as quickly as you can. The owner probably will not let you paint it anew, so use burlap, silkalene, unbleached cotton, or any cheap material, and tack it smoothly to the flats, or if the character of the play will allow it, drape the material in soft perpendicular folds. The material must be dyed the color your taste decrees as most suitable to provide a background for your scene—gay, somber, drab, or brilliant, a color which will echo and accentuate the general tone of the whole play. Only a word of caution is necessary here. Avoid red, since this is unrestful and too strong a color; avoid any bright color which will obtrude itself unduly; avoid blue, since this is a very tricky

color to manage by artificial and changing light. Generally speaking, the various tones of brown or gray will prove most satisfactory for this background of scenery. A very simple stencil design, sparingly used in the frieze or about the doors and windows, will supply all necessary decoration. Windows and doors, in all domestic interiors, may have curtains of appropriate material, rich or simple, but always of the plainest pattern and weave. These will supplement and contrast with the prevailing tone of the walls, and have a certain decorative value of their own.

EXTERIOR SCENES

Thus, the handling of interiors is comparatively simple. It reduces itself chiefly to an intelligent effort to produce an effect of simplicity, unobtrusiveness, and appropriate color. But when one is confronted with the problem of designing

and executing exterior scenes, one meets a problem which the very greatest modern stage designers and craftsmen have not yet solved to their own satisfaction. Intelligent opinion of all shades is agreed that the best efforts to produce a successful illusion of natural landscape, with the light, color, atmosphere, and texture all rendered faithfully,—a landscape which composes at all with the human element and action represented by the actors, have practically failed. Beautiful effects of light and color abound; but, when all is done, the forest, desert, street, garden, orchard, or seacoast, remain palpably paint, canvas, *papier maché,* and plaster. Long ago people agreed to believe that for the purpose of the theater this counterfeit should be accepted; and the toil of hundreds of skillful men has been expended to make the counterfeit appear, each year, a bit more like the real thing. But behold a

generation which says that it will no longer accept or even find curious and interesting even the cleverest substitute. A public is growing up to say: "Away with all this painful and hopeless struggle to make paint and plaster pass for the living tree and the ancient rock. Let us end a deception which deceives nobody. Let us really 'make believe.' Let us use our imagination a little." The most keenly active and intelligent managers have begun, as everybody knows, to work along this line in their designs and construction. With great simplicity, but with bold drawing, definite effects of light, and a few carefully chosen constructed shapes, they *suggest* the locality of an act. They use symbols only. They give just enough to supply decoration, and to let the imagination play freely. If one lets himself recall, say, those features of the Mohammedan city he has seen or dreamed of, how

much, or how very little, flashes up from the welter of confused impressions and half-recollections? A white wall, a minaret, an oddly shaped arch, a blazing sky. A few things, clear and definite, typical and suggestive—only essential things—compose this or any other recollected scene, when first it flashes back to one. And it is on the basis of this truth that the new school proceeds. Success is not yet complete; the laws and the rules of this new method of stage decoration are not yet established or formulated. Perhaps, as yet, it is little more than an ideal. But, unquestionably, it proceeds on right lines; and it is a theory of scene-making with which amateurs will presently have to reckon. At least one enterprising and courageous amateur manager has already made some interesting and valuable experiments, has achieved also some beautiful effects, in this line of endeavor. De-

siring once, for example, to set the stage to represent a garden, he quite discarded the scenery supplied him of the conventional sort, and set up merely a background painted in the cool colors of a northern sky, against which he placed bold groups of native cedars, with screens of vines to mask the entrances at right and left, with a wall fountain as the center of interest. And the scene possessed vigorous character and great charm, properly lighted. One cannot too strongly recommend the amateur generally to make experiments in stage decoration and suggestive or symbolic setting, of a like sort. Effort of that sort will prove a large part of the educative value of any active work in the drama or the theater.

COSTUMES

Consideration of the problem of costuming a play belongs in this part of the

little book, because the dresses and accouterments of the players should always be designed and chosen in connection with the design and color of the scenery. Projected against the quiet background, they become very important as lending the brightest notes of color on the scene.

Does it appear like an argument supporting the obvious to insist that stage costumes shall be both correct and beautiful? The professional stage is hardly open to any general criticism on this score. The efforts of the artist and the historical scholar have been combined again and again to produce effects in this department which are beyond all criticism. But the hapless amateur, once more the victim of adverse conditions, seems almost compelled by an irresistible fate to commit blunders in the matter of costume which are painful when they are not laughable. Laughable, because so very often a man's

costume makes him look the ass he feels himself to be; painful, because they are usually selected from a costumer's stock at that worthy's confident direction, and so are too often wholly incorrect in design, shabby and tawdry in appearance.

A very serious effort should be made to obviate all this; to make the costuming of a play one of its very best features. Costumes should be (1) correct in cut and color for the period or the character they are intended for; (2) properly fitted and adjusted; (3) carefully considered in regard to their mutual values as color. When all these points have been looked after, what genuine enjoyment costumes give! How satisfied the actors are! How beautifully the dresses decorate the stage! Best of all, perhaps, from one point of view, any well costumed amateur play means hours of real enjoyment and worth-while study over the fascinating

books of historical costume and design in the libraries and the pictures in the galleries. In the books about former days and ways, in the pictures of old time people, one makes the oddest and most pleasant discoveries, one begins most charming acquaintances; one gets a store of quaint knowledge of the clothes, the fal-lals, the habits, tastes, and whims, of many ancient worthies and gallants all interesting, all picturesque.

It should be remembered that what may appear very small defects and inconsistencies in the dressing room, when the costume is being tried on, will become grossly apparent and perhaps a sure source of mirth or grief to the audience, when paraded in the glare of the footlights. Let us recall two or three of the commonest lapses of this sort.

A very common trouble is that rented amateur costumes are too small, with too

short sleeves, or too narrow shoulders, or dangerous to sit down in. Be sure that any error of this sort is corrected early. If the actor is uncomfortable and unhappy, good-by to any thought of success in his part.

Another frequent blemish on an otherwise satisfactory costume is the introduction of some modern detail—using costume here in the sense of an old time dress or habit. Men will very commonly, and with disastrous effect, wear an everyday collar inside the starched ruff of the Elizabethan age, inside the falling collar of the Puritan, the elaborately folded "steenkirk" of the Cavalier, the tall neckbands of the eighteenth century, or the satin stock of later years. They will wear a collar of unmilitary cut with a uniform. They will retain a beard or a mustache, when playing a character in the age of smooth faces. Both men and women are

let be careless as to the kind of shoes they wear in costume plays, though any inconsistency or anachronism in one's foot gear, for some reason or other, is especially apparent on the stage and quite destructive of all proper effect. Select the shoes for any costume play—cothurn, buskin, sandal, boot, or slipper, with the utmost care. Modern shoes, however flimsily disguised with a false top or a broad buckle, simply will not do.

Minor slips, which can and must be corrected, involve an ignorance of or a carelessness about the conventional way of wearing certain kinds of clothes. Military uniform, ecclesiastical vestments, court dress, servants' livery, cowboys' neckerchiefs, peasant dress,—these costumes or parts of costume, to cite only a few familiar examples, are all worn according to fixed regulations or established custom; and so they must be worn on the

stage. Carelessness here will rob the play of a special quality which no other virtue can quite replace. Fidelity means conversely an added and a very real charm. It will give an actor a certain feeling of "being more in the part," also, if he feels that his costume is absolutely correct and suitable, as well as easy and comfortable. A good costume will often give an actor just the extra zest and "zip," which his work at rehearsal has somehow lacked.

If it is intended to make the costumes for a play in home workshops—which has both decided advantages and obvious perils, the makers should be quite sure that they have excellent patterns to go by, and they must be carefully directed by one responsible supervisor to prevent any independent judgment in the matter of colors. It should be remembered also that very expensive materials are usually wasted.

The stage light is such, and the distance between the actor and the audience is so considerable, that substitute materials are perfectly allowable, and much to be encouraged. All that is necessary to remember is that, in using a substitute for velvet, satin, brocade, leather, fur, or any other costly stuff, be sure (1) that the substitute, when draped, will fall into the same folds and take the same lights, as the original; (2) that its general character, as a textile, is very similar to the more expensive weave.

THE LIGHTS

The relative values, and the commoner functions, of the various sets of lights on the stage, must be thoroughly understood by the stage manager; and while the amateur stage can rarely enjoy the advantages of the splendid equipment of the better modern theaters, it should be the resolve

of everybody responsible for the production of the amateur play that it be given under as good conditions of lighting as is in any way possible. Do not economize on the electrician. Get him to install just as much of a complete system as you can possibly manage, if only for a very few performances, if you have at heart the real success of your play. And arrange for a great many rehearsals of the general and special lighting arrangements, so that on the evening of the play, there will be no awkward hitches, no possibility of the sun rising, or the firelight beginning to glow, some minutes too soon or too late.

It is thought well here to enumerate the various conventional parts of the stage lighting system, as we have it in all the good theaters, with the idea that, if it cannot be adopted in its entirety, at least the most necessary parts thereof can be arranged for.

Under the usual plan, *the direct illumination* of the stage is provided by the footlights, aided more or less by the *spot lights*. The footlights are set along the front of the stage, outside the drop curtain, the full width of the proscenium, usually in a shallow trough so that their dazzle will be screened from the eyes of the audience. Ideally, the footlights are arranged in three banks, each of a different color (white, amber, blue), each with its own switch and dimmer, for ease in manipulation. But as such elaboration will hardly be possible for school or dramatic club uses, it will be enough if there is provided a continuous line of bulbs, set the width of the stage, spaced about eight inches on centers, amber bulbs alternating with the white in the proportion of about one in three. This will give a warm but not too garish a light. If the play demands a moonlight effect, or any cold light,

it will be necessary to employ blue bulbs mingled with the white, and the amber bulbs must be switched off when the blue are being used. The *spotlight,* placed in the rear of the house, is intended to throw a special illumination, of some particular color, on the whole stage or any part of it, or on some special actor. Often absurdly abused, the spotlight can be made very important indeed, by producing delicate effects of color and warmth, by giving the actor or the bit of action a necessary momentary prominence. When a whole battery of spotlights is used, as in a big theater, it is often possible for a capable manager to devise for every important actor his own special, and changing *nuance* of color and degree of illumination—the light in which he plays subtly and imperceptibly seconding and echoing the general meaning of the character he impersonates. One spotlight, however, should always be

made available for a good amateur play, if more than one is out of the question.

The direct and vivid illumination cast by the "foots" and the "spot" would cast the shadows of the actors against the scenery, were it not counteracted. This is provided for by the *border lights,* an absolutely essential feature of even the simplest equipment. Set in rows, each about half the width of the stage, just back of the top of the proscenium arch and behind each of the flies or drop borders, with brilliant reflectors, the border lights must be kept in very delicate balance with the footlights. Too strong or too feeble an overhead light will result in curious shadows and foreshortenings on the stage.

If it is desired to illuminate special restricted areas of the stage from the sides, recourse is commonly had to the so-called *bunch lights.* These are not installed as fixtures, but are set on standards and can

be moved about as necessary, connected up with plugs in the floor of the stage back of the scenery. They are used to produce effects of sunrise or sunset, of moonlight, of firelight from a hearth, for instance. The changing colors often necessary in this kind of illumination are produced from the bunch lights by passing films of gelatine colored in reds, yellows, blues, or violet tones, before a flame of carbon or calcium.

Strip lights are short sections of bulbs, detachable and capable of being placed in any part of the lighting system, to produce an intensified or special illumination.

Remember, in general, that all white bulbs will make a very garish light. It is safe as a rule to tone down this white glare with a proportion of amber colored bulbs, especially for interior scenes. The border lights, however, can safely be left all white.

If a play has to be given with the very strictest economy and under conditions which make any elaborate installation of lights impossible, the management must provide as the minimum requirement (1) a row of footlights, running the entire width of the proscenium arch, with a reflector of *white painted* tin; (2) strips of border lights, with *bright* reflectors, behind the top of the proscenium and behind each piece of scenery suspended from above, and behind each "wing" or border, if this arrangement of scenery is used, instead of a boxed-in set. Footlights alone will never do; (3) a "dimmer," by which the intensity of the illumination can be controlled by handling a switch.

"BACK STAGE"

The following is a list of miscellaneous hints and cautions intended for those very

important personages, the stage carpenter and the property man. They are intended to cover some of the commoner problems arising out of the setting of the stage and the needs of the action in most plays.

Doors in scenery are made conventionally to swing inward, toward the stage. This arrangement has become established, possibly, from the belief that it affords the best means for emphatic and effective exits and entrances.

Window glass can be simulated by sheets of the galvanized meshed material used in making screen doors, cut to the proper sizes. Be sure that it is bright and new; old screening is useless.

As far as possible, avoid the use of *pictures* on the walls of interior sets. They are rarely effective as a decoration, looking "spotty" and bad in color, and are a great

nuisance to handle quickly in shifting scenes.

If the action of the play calls for a *mirror,* and this must be hung in a place where it will reflect the audience, place a sheet of tin or zinc over its face.

Use no *chairs* or other seats less than 17 inches off the floor. Lower seats are hard to get into, and worse to leave.

Push buttons and electric switches should be placed in the wall about shoulder high. In this way the actor can reach and touch them with a graceful rather than an ungraceful gesture.

Always *cover the stage* with a heavy crash or tarpaulin, laid perfectly smooth, of any dull neutral color for interiors, of a brownish green for exteriors.

Thunder, by a venerable convention, may still be simulated (at least on the amateur stage) by shaking a piece of sheet iron. *Lightning,* if the theater's

equipment is meager, can be approximated by winking high power tungsten lamps before reflectors.

Rolling clouds of *smoke* can be rendered by steam on which red and yellow light is played.

The effect of *blood* from a wound is produced by glycerine mingled with a crimson dyestuff.

Snow on the garments of a character can be simulated best by applications of wet salt, just before the character makes his entrance.

Wine is best made from cold tea. Remember that ginger ale or any other "soft drink," used for this purpose, will sometimes play tricks with one's throat and vocal organs for an instant after drinking it, and so is risky.

A little electric stove, connected up and hidden in the cottage grate or old time fireplace, is very useful, if the play requires

the use of hot water or a bit of cooking. "The real steam" of the tea kettle, the real scent of toast or bacon, will please the average audience more than one would believe possible, and will contribute a little also to the verisimilitude of the scene. Similarly, any bit of homely, domestic routine, like setting a table, serving a meal or a drink, opening the mail, to choose random examples, should always be faithfully presented in all its details, supposing that the effect of reality is being aimed at all through the production. This has to be judged very carefully. Sometimes any very slight excess of realistic detail will jar terribly. Here, as always, one has to think of the play as a whole, even when studying the smallest details.

To shift the scenes expeditiously, a pretty perfect system is necessary. Remember that it is a great mistake to let the *entr'acte* intervals be more than ten or (at

the outside) twelve minutes in duration. Smartness and speed in handling are essential; and these depend on establishing a well articulated movement of the carpenter's crew and that of the property man. If you are dependent on amateur and green assistance in this very important department, do not fail to rehearse the setting and striking of every act several times before the performance.

The first thing to do is to have the property man collect in perfectly defined places, every bit of furniture, accessories, and properties used in each act, where they can be instantly handled.

Next, stack up in separate places the scenery for each act, so there will be no confusion here, no handling of the wrong pieces.

Suppose the command "Strike!" is given by the stage manager, as the signal to remove the setting of one scene and put on

another. Instantly the carpenter's crew slide and carry off the sides and the rear of the scenery walls; the moment there is sufficient room the property man's crew carry out all the movable articles on the stage, and place them in a pile together. Next, the property men bring on the stage all the heavier pieces of furniture, the floor coverings, of the next act. Retiring, they give place to the scene shifters, who first place in position the rear wall, then the side walls, lastly the ceiling and the backing. When the scenery is in place, the property men bring on the small articles and dispose them where the action of the play requires them. The moment the scenery is in place, the electrician will start connecting up any lamps, wall lights, or hanging table lamps, which are needed. And it is unnecessary to say that all the preliminary work of this sort is to be completed long before the performance starts. The

electrician can work but just so fast, and his work at the time of scene shifting must be limited to screwing in bulbs and making other simple connections. Never try to carry bulky properties through scenery doors; handle all the properties of the larger sort when the stage is clear. Window curtains, portières, and other wall fixtures, should always be so hung or otherwise arranged that they can be carried out bodily with the "flats" of scenery.

THE ORCHESTRA

If use is made of *incidental music* during the action of the play, and in the intermissions, the stage manager and the orchestra leader must understand one another clearly on several points.

Entr'acte music ought to be in keeping with the general character of the play.

If music is required during the play, as

an accompaniment to the action, the stage manager must give the orchestra leader in writing such unmistakable cues and other directions as will forestall any chance of missing the connection between the lines, the action, and the music. It is imperative that the orchestra leader shall rehearse any and all incidental music with the company, certainly once (at the final rehearsal) and, if possible, much oftener.

Ten minutes before the play starts, the orchestra must be signaled to its place.

The best signal for the orchestra to cease playing, as the curtain is ready to be raised, is wink the lights on the music stands, dim the lights in the auditorium, and switch on the footlights, in this order. The use of a bell as a signal for the curtain to be raised is now out of fashion. The signals with the lights are less obtrusive but equally emphatic, and are therefore to be preferred.

IN CONCLUSION

Amateurs sometimes think of all the work connected with the mechanical part of a production as uninteresting. They are apt to believe that acting the play is about all there is to a performance. But it is to be sincerely hoped that all groups of amateurs who wish to get all the good and all the pleasure possible out of their work and fun, will undertake to learn the duties and the responsibilities of the costumers, scene builders, electricians, and indispensable "Props,"—of those, in short, whose work contributes directly to the artistic general effect of the piece.

If amateur productions are reduced to a mere learning of lines and "business," under nervous coaching, they are not worth bothering about. If they are so conceived as to make a call not only on the histrionic ability but also on the ingenuity,

taste, and cultivation of the people organizing them, amateur plays are of very great value indeed.

And that, to-day, there is a great and growing interest among responsible people concerning the theater and the amateur production, and the whole question of the relation of the stage to the community, is a matter for profound congratulation. For until the theater becomes a popular institution in every sense, it is still an alien, still an exotic, still nothing but a playhouse for the well-to-do. And that the amateur play is the means of bringing thousands of persons to a knowledge of the theater, to an interest in it, to a love for it, is perfectly true. For this reason alone, perhaps, were there no others, thoughtful people should encourage by every means, and support with enthusiasm, all efforts to make popular and

vital that kind of acting and production which this little book hopes, in a small way, to make easier.

A GLOSSARY
OF
COMMON STAGE TERMS

ACT, a principal division of a play. Also applied to a short play, monologue, dance, song, or exhibition, presented by an individual or a small company, as a number on a program.

APRON, the part of the stage extending toward the audience from the proscenium.

ARCH, a section of upright scenery which includes a principal doorway or archway.

AT RISE, at the beginning of a play or an act.

BACK, the region behind the visible stage; also called "back stage."

BACK DROP, a single piece of upright scenery extending the entire width of the visible stage and forming its rear boundary; used as a background, most often with exterior sets, depicting landscape and sky.

BACKING, sections of upright scenery placed behind doors, windows, and other openings in interior sets.

BORDERS, sections of scenery depending from above the stage, of varying length, representing (typically) the sky, a ceiling, or branches of trees. "Cut borders" is sometimes applied to sections of upright scenery used on the sides of the stage to represent trees and shrubs, and to mask (usually) entrances. "Wood cuts" is another name for the same pieces.

BORDER LIGHTS, rows of lights giving illumination from above.

BRACE, a jointed pole used to support scenery.

BUNCH LIGHTS, clusters of lights on portable standards serving to illuminate special areas, from the sides.

CROSS (TO), to move from one side of the stage toward another, in any direction.

DIMMER, a device to regulate the intensity of the lights.

DISCOVERED, present on the stage at the opening of the play or act.

DOCK, the region under the stage.

DOWN, in the direction of the audience. Also called "Down stage" (as either an adverb or an adjective: e.g.:—"Crosses down stage; raises down stage arm").

DROPS, pieces of scenery extending the entire width and height of the visible stage, to supply backgrounds, hung at varying distances

from the front. "Act drops" are the backgrounds for large divisions of the play; "scene drops" are the backgrounds of subdivisions. Drops are sometimes employed merely to create an effect of haze or shadow, in which case they are made of a special "gauze" to be in various degrees transparent.

FLAT, a section of upright scenery.

FLIES, a gallery above the stage from which scenery is lowered and raised.

FLYMAN, an employee who handles scenery from the flies.

FOOTS, the footlights.

FRONT, the part of the visible stage nearest the audience. "Out front," before the curtain or in the audience.

FRONT SCENE, a portion of a play performed before a very shallow set of scenery. Sometimes called "a scene in one."

GRIP, a scene shifter. Assistant to the stage carpenter.

GROOVES, a series of grooves built out from the flies at regular intervals, to support the tops of pieces of upright scenery. Not often found in modern theaters.

LASH LINE, a cord used to bind together and steadying adjoining sections of upright scenery.

LEFT, the actor's left; abbreviated to L.

LIGHT PLOT, a statement of all lighting effects required in a play, with detailed directions regarding their start, duration, intensity, and character, supplied to the electrician.

MUSIC PLOT, a statement of all the incidental music required in a play, with cues and directions for beginning and ending each selection, furnished to the orchestra leader.

ON, on the visible stage.

OFF, off the visible stage.

PRACTICABLE, or "practical," applied to all properties and to pieces of scenery which can actually be used. Real food and drink, a window which opens, a door which locks, for instance, are "practical."

PROPERTIES, the various articles required for the actors' use in the action of the play.

PROPERTY MAN, the person who has charge of the properties.

PROSCENIUM, the arch framing the visible stage.

RETURNS, sections of upright scenery set on the right and left, just inside the proscenium, adjoining the side flats and connected with them at right angles.

RIGGING LOFT, the flies or fly gallery.

RUN, an artificial inclined plane leading to the visible stage, as a path or a staircase.

SCENE, a subdivision of the play's action.

SCENE PLOT, a list of the "sets" required in the successive acts or scenes of a play, furnished to the stage carpenter.

SET, the scenery of any part of a play. ("The second act set.")

SET PIECE, a structure built out from the scenery or isolated on the stage, as a tree, a mound, a wall, a well curb.

SPOT LIGHT, a light focussed on a small area to give prominence to an individual actor or small group, or to impart a special color to a part of the setting. Operated from behind and above the audience.

STRIP LIGHTS, short sections of lights, in rows, with reflectors, portable, to illuminate special areas.

TORMENTORS, the passages between the returns and the proscenium.

TRAP, a hole cut in the floor of the stage.

UP, toward the rear of the visible stage.

UPSTAGE, the part of the visible stage farthest from the audience.